



**SB 931/HB1036:** Public Utilities – Generating Stations – Generation and Siting (Renewable Energy Certainty Act)

**Position:** SUPPORT

Dear Chairs, Vice Chairs, and Members of the Committees,

CI Renewables is a Maryland based commercial and industrial solar developer specializing in projects with municipalities, universities, schools, and hospitals. Our projects include standard ground mount, projects on brownfields, as well as rooftops, parking garages, and parking canopies. While we have developed projects in 20 states, we call Maryland home to our headquarters.

I would like to focus my testimony on the core intent and purpose of this bill. After last session stakeholders, including representatives from the solar industry, environmentalists, preservationists, the agricultural community, Maryland Association of Counties, and relevant state agency. Collectively, we were all tired of the Sisyphean chore that was fighting about solar siting.that after

On one “side” we were facing reasonably sized and located projects that were being stonewalled by jurisdictions that either did not want solar within their borders or jurisdictions that proclaimed they wanted solar but put up enough arbitrary and capricious roadblocks to make it impossible to actually build. On the other, there were jurisdictions dealing with or witnessing projects that truly decimated several contiguous properties (usually farmland) in a way that likely precluded them from being farms ever again.

During this workgroup, the conversation went from individual solar projects to conversations around developing a policy that encouraged the kind of solar projects that worked with the land, that were appropriate in the communities they were located, and provided the protections communities needed. Contrary to what you may hear from the extremes on each sides, a middle ground is possible and we think this legislation moves the parties here.

Let me give some examples of what I mean. In Howard County, CI Renewables has two solar projects on farms that have turned on and five more in process. Each project is on an

owner operated farm and in each case the solar project is on unfarmable or low yield fields, on land where the owner needs the revenue to keep the farm a farm, and if on farmable land (and even in some cases when not), the field will remain farmable after the solar project is removed. Additionally, EVERY SINGLE PROJECT is on a farm that will continue to be an active farm for the duration of the solar lease. While in some cases we are grazing sheep or other agrovoltaic practices, that is not what I mean when I say active farm. In all cases they use a maximum of 34% of the parcel and the rest will continue to be actively farmed. None of our projects, so far, have gone through CPCN, the County held the entire approval process.

These should be the kind of projects that are acceptable to all jurisdictions and the type of projects that should be encouraged through zoning and permitting but sadly, except for Howard County, nearly every jurisdiction in the state has standards or laws that make these kinds of projects impossible to build. In fact, as it stands now, in every jurisdiction it is EASIER for us to build a big utility scale project than it is to build a direct generation project such as a community solar or net metered project for a government or nonprofit. It is because of these restrictions that we are being pushed into projects sized specifically so we can go to the PSC to pre-empt the County.

This bill, despite the scary stories you will hear, makes these types of projects possible and it will require them to be done in a way that respects the land and the communities.

While it may not appear so after the hearing, I am also very optimistic that with continued discussions between many of the individuals/organizations involved in the original work group that we are extremely close to an agreement that will work for everyone.

One final point about another section of this bill, CI favors the auto enrollment proposal assuming the technical fixes come through. As a company that works very closely with counties across the state, this project enables counties and municipalities to provide their communities locally generated solar power at a rate guaranteed to be less than what they pay retail.

We respectfully urge the Committees to provide a favorable report on SB 931/HB 1036. Should you have any questions, please feel free to contact me.

Sincerely,

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