

UNFAVORABLE

Senator Brian Feldman, Chair

Delegate C.T. Wilson, Chair

Members of the Senate Education, Energy and the Environment Committee &

House Economic Matters Committee

Dear Senators and Delegates,

My name is Janet Christensen-Lewis. I am here today in opposition to SB0931 and HB1036.

These bills directly contradict the mission of the Kent Conservation and Preservation Alliance (KCPA), the organization I represent as Chair of its Board of Directors. KCPA is dedicated to educating and advocating for the protection of agriculture, rural landscapes, and the historical and cultural significance of these landscapes to the well-being of communities in Kent County and throughout Maryland. I urge you to watch *Kent County's Storied Landscape: Place, Past, and Present*, a documentary produced in cooperation with Maryland Public Television that premiered on April 18, 2023, for context.

Maryland's legislators are failing to safeguard the well-being of the very residents they were elected to serve. While the complexities of energy policy may be lost on the average Marylander, the consequences are not—especially when they manifest as skyrocketing energy costs. In their rush to shape a future vision of sustainability, lawmakers have disregarded the present reality: these policies are eroding the standard of living for today's residents.

SB0931 and HB1036 are just the latest in a string of misguided energy policies. Maryland has propped up the solar and renewable energy markets since the introduction of the Renewable Portfolio Standard (RPS) in 2004. As part of this system, utilities are required to purchase Solar Renewable Energy Credits (SRECs) or pay Alternative Compliance Payments (ACPs), costs that are inevitably passed on to ratepayers. Additionally, as solar penetration increases, so does the need for expanded transmission infrastructure—another expense that falls on Maryland's residents and businesses through higher electricity bills. Market manipulation to favor one producer of energy over another inevitably leads to higher prices. This

legislation continues a troubling pattern of state overreach that disproportionately harms rural communities, where agriculture is not just an industry but a way of life, deeply rooted in Maryland's history and culture. Senator Feldman's and Delegate Wilson's legislation are yet another blow to these communities, furthering an agenda that prioritizes politically driven energy mandates over fundamental economic principles and the lives of citizens. The truth is, if solar energy were truly commercially viable, it would not require the crutch of federal subsidies and state mandates.

Senator Feldman and presumably Senate President Ferguson have chosen to side with the solar industry, disregarding the peoples' voices in rural counties and trampling on local land-use planning and taxation authority. These counties have spent years and money carefully drafting Comprehensive Plans and Land Use Ordinance, mandated by Maryland Law, to reflect the priorities of their residents—only to have those efforts overridden under the banner of climate change. The solar lobby insists that because the sun is abundant, solar energy is inherently cheap and affordable. This disregards real-world examples where regions with a high reliance on renewables—whether solar, wind, or both—face energy costs that are 2 to 2.5 times higher. Additionally, their rhetoric ignores reality: the solar industry's expansion depends on subsidies and mandates, allowing developers to offer lease payments that farmers cannot compete with, shutting them out of the land they need to sustain their livelihoods.

The consequences are clear. Solar development is consuming agricultural land—especially on the Eastern Shore, where some of the richest farmland in the nation exists. Year after year, legislators have stripped counties of their ability to protect these vital resources. Now, the Renewable Energy Certainty Act adds another layer of risk by fast-tracking unsafe and toxic battery storage projects in the same manner as solar energy generation. Let's not forget Moss Landing—the largest battery storage facility in California—was shut down twice in 2021 for overheating and, since catching fire on January 15, 2025, continues to release toxic fumes. Is this what the Maryland Legislature wants to foist onto rural communities?

The irony is that while the Legislature pushes bills that harm agriculture, it is simultaneously eliminating funding for land preservation.

SB0931 imposes a rigid, one-size-fits-all landscaping standard for solar projects, ignoring the unique character of each town and county. It treats the gateway to a historic town no differently than a remote back-road, disregarding the value of scenic landscapes and cultural heritage. Rural communities are not just empty spaces on a map; they are living, breathing histories—preserving traditions that define Maryland's identity. Yet, this bill sacrifices all of that for the sake of a flawed environmental agenda.

Adding insult to injury, Maryland's energy policies are not only ineffective but also financially reckless. SB0931 undermines local financial autonomy, stripping counties of revenue-generation authority while imposing unfunded mandates that force them to do more with less. And for what? The projected reduction in Maryland's contribution to global CO₂ emissions—between 0.16% and 0.2%—is so insignificant that it is statistically irrelevant. Worse yet, solar panels installed in Maryland are often manufactured in countries powered by coal, while the raw materials are extracted using fossil fuels. These policies are not reducing emissions; they are simply outsourcing them.

There is plenty of room to acknowledge that Maryland's current energy policies are failing without being a climate change denier. In fact, if Climate Change is high on your list of priorities, then Maryland's current energy policies should be of grave concern to you. If net-zero CO₂ emissions are truly the goal, then lawmakers should be asking hard questions about why billions invested worldwide have created little increase in the percent of the world's energy supplied by renewables and failed to produce measurable reductions in emissions. The lack of progress should give anyone pause.

Maryland's legislature, the solar lobby, and the NGOs that support them continue to celebrate each new solar mandate as a victory for “progressive” energy policy. But make no mistake—these policies are proving to be economically devastating.

Farmers and rural residents are being sacrificed in pursuit of an agenda that disregards the real-world consequences. In the end, unless the Legislature thoroughly evaluates current and future policies, Maryland will not only fail to achieve its net-zero targets but also risk destroying its farmland and agricultural economy, eroding the culture and historic character of local communities, losing the confidence of voters, stifling economic growth, and impoverishing its citizens.