



Enhancing and Advancing Land Conservation

Testimony on SB 116

February 13, 2025 – Education, Energy and the Environment Committee

Data Center Impact Analysis and Report

Kristin Kirkwood, Chair Forever Maryland

Position: Favorable

Forever Maryland represents Maryland's land trust community. Local land trusts are valuable partners in the efforts to preserve the most important farms, forests and ecological areas in the state. We work side by side with state and local government to reach the goal of permanently preserving 40% of the state by the year 2040.

Data centers are a feature of our modern economy, but their development comes with both economic and environmental costs. We support SB 116 which would require a study to quantify those costs and benefits.

Data center development directly impacts land that is currently preserved and ongoing efforts to increase the pace and quality of land preservation in the following ways:

- **Energy Supply** – Data centers require tremendous amounts of energy. Maryland faces significant challenges in meeting the states' ambitions renewable energy goals. When data centers are added into the equation, the additional solar energy installations needed will require exponentially more land. The annual rental payments offered by solar companies eclipse the amount that can be paid by existing land preservation programs. It is not unusual for a farmer or landowner to receive a rental offer of \$4,000 an acre from a solar developer for a 25-year period. At the same time a one-time offer for a purchase of an easement is generally \$8,000 an acre or less.
- **Energy Transmission** – The Piedmont Reliability Project is only one of the multiple transmission lines that will be required to meet the region's projected data center growth. These transmission lines have a substantial negative impact on the conservation values protected by existing easements. The threat of transmission lines has led our most conservation-minded farmers and landowners to question the fairness of the decision they made to voluntarily preserve their properties. While they have significantly reduced allowed uses on their farm, they feel threatened by the seemingly random and inevitable placement of industrial scale transmission lines across their property.

We look forward to working with the state to achieve the goal of preserving 40% of the state by 2040. The study proposed by SB 116 is a first step toward ensuring that the impacts of data centers on our most important farms, forests and ecological areas are indeed protected in perpetuity.