



## WRITTEN TESTIMONY

**Bill No.:** SB737 - Property Rights Protection Act of 2025

**COMMITTEE:** Senate Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee

**HEARING DATE:** March 6, 2025

**SPONSORS:** Senator Folden

**POSITION:** Favorable

I respectfully submit this testimony in **strong support** of **Senate Bill 737**, the **Property Rights Protection Act of 2025**, which prohibits the use of **eminent domain** for the construction of power lines and renewable energy projects, protecting **private property rights, farmland, and conservation easements**.

This legislation is critical to **preserving Maryland's rural communities**, ensuring that private landowners retain control over their property and preventing **unjust takings** for infrastructure projects that primarily benefit corporate interests. **I urge the committee to issue a favorable report** for this essential bill to uphold Maryland's longstanding commitment to **land conservation, agricultural sustainability, and local autonomy**.

### **Negative Impact on Property Values**

The construction of high-voltage transmission lines has been shown to **significantly reduce property values**, particularly for homes and farms near the right-of-way (ROW). A 2018 study published in the *Journal of Real Estate Research* found that vacant lots located near high-voltage transmission lines sold for **44.9% less** than similar properties farther away, and lots within 1,000 feet of transmission lines saw values drop by **17.9%**<sup>1</sup>. The **Maryland Piedmont Reliability Project (MPRP)** poses a major threat to property values in Baltimore, Carroll, and Frederick Counties, where **65 residential buildings are located within 200 feet of the ROW, and an additional 234 homes are within 200-500 feet of the proposed transmission corridor**. This will not only **financially harm hundreds of homeowners** but also **decrease the overall tax base**, impacting local schools, infrastructure, and community services.

### **Protecting Maryland's Agricultural and Conservation Lands**

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<sup>1</sup> *The Electrifying Factor Affecting Your Property's Value*, Wall Street Journal (August 15, 2018) online at <https://www.wsj.com/articles/the-electrifying-factor-affecting-your-property-s-value-1534343506> (reporting that vacant lots adjacent to high-voltage transmission lines sell for 45% less than equivalent lots not located near transmission lines. Non-adjacent lots still located within 1,000 feet of transmission lines sell at a discount of 18%).



Maryland has long been a national leader in land preservation, with programs like the **Maryland Agricultural Land Preservation Foundation (MALPF)** and the **Rural Legacy Program** safeguarding thousands of acres from development. **SB737 strengthens these efforts** by preventing state and corporate entities from using eminent domain to seize protected lands for energy projects.

- **Impact on Conservation Easements:** The proposed **MPRP** and similar initiatives threaten over **1,800 acres of conserved land**, fragmenting vital habitats and undermining decades of environmental protection efforts.
- **Farmland Protection:** Transmission line construction disrupts agricultural operations, diminishing soil productivity, **devaluing farmland**, and making it difficult for farmers to sustain their businesses.
- **Water and Environmental Integrity:** The expansion of transmission lines over preserved lands **increases erosion, stormwater runoff, and pollution**, endangering **Maryland's waterways, including the Chesapeake Bay**.

### **Defending Property Rights from Corporate Overreach**

The right to **private property ownership** is a fundamental principle of our democracy, and **SB737 ensures that private citizens, not corporate utility companies, decide how their land is used**.

- **Landowners should not be forced to surrender property for private energy projects** that provide no direct benefit to them.
- **SB737 ensures that local communities retain decision-making power**, requiring that any new transmission projects **secure voluntary agreements** rather than relying on state-mandated land seizures.

### **Economic and Community Impact**

The forced construction of new transmission lines through eminent domain leads to:

- **Declining property values** for affected homeowners and farms.
- **Loss of generational farmland**, disrupting the state's rural economy.
- **Reduction in tourism and outdoor recreation**, which rely on **Maryland's scenic landscapes and protected open spaces**.



Meanwhile, alternatives to new transmission lines—**such as upgrading existing infrastructure and utilizing distributed energy resources**—offer a **more sustainable, community-driven approach** to addressing energy needs.

### **Conclusion**

**SB737 is a necessary and responsible step** to ensure that **Maryland’s property owners, conservation lands, and rural communities are protected** from **corporate land grabs and unnecessary transmission projects**.

For these reasons, I respectfully urge the committee to issue a **favorable report on SB737** and protect **Maryland’s land, people, and future generations**.

### **Respectfully submitted,**

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