



Senate Bill 478

Support for Senate Bill 478—Public Utilities—Solar Energy Generating Stations—Local Approval

Position: **FAV**

Date: March 6, 2025

To: **Education, Energy, and
the Environment**

On behalf of the Caroline County Commissioners, we wish to express our **strong support** for **Senate Bill 478—Public Utilities—Solar Energy Generating Stations—Local Approval**, which would ensure that local governments retain the authority to approve or deny large-scale solar energy projects. This bill is critical for rural counties like ours, where unrestricted solar development threatens to consume prime agricultural land and undermine local zoning regulations designed to balance renewable energy expansion with land preservation.

Caroline County has carefully crafted zoning regulations—established in Ordinance #2017 and updated under Ordinance #2017-2—to guide responsible solar development while protecting farmland, rural landscapes, and designated growth areas. Under these regulations:

- Commercial Solar Energy Systems are permitted only in specific zoning districts (R – Rural, C-2 General Commercial, and I-2 Light Industrial) and require Special Use Exceptions and Site Plan Approval to ensure compatibility with surrounding land uses.
- A 2,000-acre cap is in place to prevent excessive conversion of farmland to solar farms, helping to preserve the county’s agricultural economy.
- Solar projects are prohibited on parcels in Transferable Development Rights (TDR) receiving areas, on properties where TDRs have been lifted, and on land with preservation easements—safeguarding land already designated for long-term conservation.
- Minimum setbacks of 200 feet from property lines and roadways are required to minimize visual and environmental impacts.

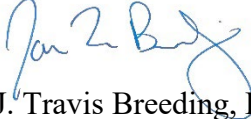
Despite these locally adopted regulations, the current Public Service Commission (PSC) approval process allows solar projects to move forward without county consent, disregarding zoning protections that were put in place with community input and careful planning. SB 478 ensures that local governments, not state agencies, have the final say in determining where and how solar projects fit into their jurisdictions.

This legislation is not an anti-solar measure—Caroline County fully supports renewable energy and has permitted solar development within the zoning framework established by our residents and elected officials. However, unregulated commercial-scale solar installations risk permanently

displacing productive farmland, altering rural landscapes, and conflicting with planned residential and economic growth areas. SB 478 would reinforce local control over solar siting decisions, ensuring that counties can enforce sensible caps, setback requirements, and land-use protections tailored to their specific needs.

We urge your support for SB 478 to ensure that counties like Caroline can continue to manage solar growth responsibly, balancing renewable energy development with farmland preservation and smart growth principles.

Sincerely,



J. Travis Breeding, President

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