

## Testimony in Support of SB 955

Presented by Bryan Price

Maryland State Senate Hearing on SB 955

Chair, Vice Chair, and Esteemed Members of the Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony in support of Senate Bill 955 (SB 955). My name is Bryan Price, and I am a Maryland resident committed to protecting property rights, conservation lands, and rural communities from the unjust and unnecessary expansion of overhead transmission lines. SB 955 is a critical measure that strengthens landowner protections, curbs eminent domain abuses, and ensures that large-scale energy transmission projects are not pursued at the expense of Maryland's farmers, homeowners, and environmental heritage.

The Maryland Piedmont Reliability Project (MPRP) has exemplified why stronger eminent domain protections are needed. Proposed by PJM Interconnection and energy developers, the MPRP threatens to seize private land for high-voltage transmission towers that would permanently alter Maryland's landscapes, devalue properties, and strip landowners of their rights. This project, like many transmission projects before it, relies on the ability to forcibly take land through eminent domain, often undervaluing properties in the process. SB 955 ensures that landowners do not have their properties seized for overhead transmission lines, especially on land protected by conservation easements, such as those enrolled in the Maryland Agricultural Land Preservation Foundation (MALPF) program.

For too long, Maryland's conservation and agricultural lands have been placed in the crosshairs of energy developers who view them as mere obstacles rather than the irreplaceable resources they are. Farmers who have spent generations cultivating their land and landowners who have committed to conservation programs should not be forced to defend their property against corporate overreach. SB 955 explicitly prevents transmission developers from targeting these protected lands, reinforcing the intent of conservation easements and ensuring that the lands set aside for future generations remain undisturbed.

The financial impact of large-scale transmission projects extends far beyond the land that is taken. The construction of high-voltage power lines dramatically reduces property values, making it difficult for homeowners to sell their land or use it for its intended purposes. SB 955 provides a necessary safeguard by allowing property owners within 500

feet of a condemned property to seek damages if transmission construction reduces their land value. Furthermore, landowners who challenge condemnation should not be left shouldering the financial burden of legal fees. This bill ensures that those who successfully defend their land in court receive reasonable attorney fees and that compensation standards in eminent domain cases reflect the true value of the land taken.

This issue is deeply personal for me. As someone who has spent months fighting against the MPRP, I have seen firsthand the stress, financial burden, and uncertainty that landowners endure when faced with eminent domain threats. My ancestors were among the original founders of Maryland—humble Quakers, Ark and Dove passengers, and Eastern Shore farmers who laid the groundwork for the agricultural traditions that persist today. Their commitment to responsible land stewardship helped shape Maryland's identity, and I consider it my responsibility to continue that fight by standing up for the rights of today's farmers and landowners.

Additionally, my early involvement in the Future Farmers of America (FFA) instilled in me the values of conservation, sustainability, and respect for agricultural communities. Farmers across Maryland have placed their trust in preservation programs to protect their land from industrial encroachment. If we allow transmission developers to override these protections, we will betray the very people who have dedicated their lives to feeding and sustaining our state. PSEG and other energy developers have already signaled plans to expand transmission projects across Maryland, including into the Eastern Shore, threatening even more farmland and rural communities. If we do not act now, more families will be forced into legal battles just to keep what is rightfully theirs. SB 955 sends a strong message that Maryland will not stand for corporate overreach and that our land, communities, and conservation commitments will not be sacrificed for unnecessary infrastructure.

Maryland has the opportunity to lead by example. Instead of prioritizing overhead transmission lines that destroy landscapes and disrupt communities, we should be investing in undergrounding power lines, grid-enhancing technologies, and distributed energy generation such as solar and microgrids. These modern solutions offer greater resilience, efficiency, and environmental benefits without the heavy-handed use of eminent domain.

The passage of SB 955 is about more than protecting land; it is about preserving Maryland's agricultural heritage, defending private property rights, and ensuring that energy expansion is done responsibly and equitably. I urge the committee to support SB 955 and stand with the farmers, conservationists, and homeowners who are fighting to protect their land and their future.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

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