

Testimony in Support of SB 955

Chair, Vice Chair, and Members of the Committee,

My name is Brenda Myers, and I am writing today to express my strong support for Senate Bill 955 (SB 955). This legislation is a crucial step toward protecting Maryland landowners from unjust eminent domain seizures and ensuring that our conservation lands, farms, and residential areas are shielded from disruptive and unnecessary energy infrastructure projects. If passed, SB 955 will safeguard property rights by prohibiting eminent domain for overhead transmission lines on conservation easements and ensuring fair compensation for landowners impacted by these projects.

SB 955 strengthens property rights protections and restricts eminent domain abuses by:

Prohibiting eminent domain for overhead transmission lines on land protected by conservation easements, including land in the Maryland Agricultural Land Preservation Foundation (MALPF) program. **Allowing property owners within 500 feet of a condemned property** to seek damages if their land value decreases due to transmission construction. **Ensuring that landowners who challenge condemnation receive reasonable attorney fees** if they prevail in court, leveling the playing field against powerful energy companies. **Requiring higher compensation standards** in eminent domain cases, preventing undervaluation of condemned land and ensuring fair market value for affected property owners.

The MPRP: A Case Study in Eminent Domain Overreach

The Maryland Piedmont Reliability Project, proposed by PJM Interconnection and energy developers, exemplifies why SB 955 is necessary. This transmission project would:

- **Seize private land for corporate interests**, permanently altering farms and rural communities.
- **Cut through conservation lands**, undermining Maryland's environmental commitments.
- **Devalue properties**, leaving homeowners and farmers with land that is harder to sell or use for its intended purpose.

Without SB 955, projects like the MPRP will continue to exploit eminent domain laws, displacing landowners and violating conservation agreements.

Protecting Private Property from Corporate Land Grabs

SB 955 prevents energy companies from using eminent domain to seize land that has been deliberately preserved for agricultural or environmental purposes. Without this protection, generational farmland and private homes could be taken for transmission projects that offer no direct benefit to local residents.

Defending Maryland's Conservation and Agricultural Lands

Maryland's conservation programs, including MALPF, exist to permanently safeguard farmland and forests. However, transmission developers have attempted to override these protections to push through industrial-scale projects. By explicitly banning eminent domain on these lands, SB 955 upholds the state's conservation commitments and prevents further encroachment.

Preventing Property Value Decline and Economic Loss

High-voltage transmission lines significantly reduce property values, making it difficult for affected landowners to sell or utilize their land. SB 955 allows homeowners to seek damages for property devaluation, ensuring that they are compensated fairly if transmission lines negatively impact their land.

Stopping Unchecked Expansion of Overhead Transmission Infrastructure

The MPRP is just one of many transmission projects on the horizon. With increasing pressure for regional transmission expansion, more overhead lines could be forced through rural and suburban areas. SB 955 establishes a legal precedent requiring that property rights and conservation efforts be respected rather than overridden for corporate gain.

Instead of constructing massive new transmission corridors through protected and private lands, Maryland should prioritize modern energy solutions such as: **Undergrounding power lines** to minimize land disruption and protect property values. **Grid-enhancing technologies** to improve efficiency on existing infrastructure without requiring new transmission lines. **Distributed energy generation**, such as solar and microgrids, to reduce dependence on long-distance transmission and build local energy resilience.

The passage of SB 955 is a pivotal opportunity to stop forced land seizures and establish a fairer, more responsible approach to energy infrastructure planning. Landowners, farmers, and communities must stand together to protect our rights and our land from unjust eminent domain practices.

I urge this committee to support SB 955 to ensure that Maryland prioritizes property rights, conservation, and smart energy planning over unnecessary and destructive transmission expansion.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Brenda Myers

Hampstead, Maryland