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Testimony in Support of Senate Bill 0116

To: The Committee on Energy, Education, and the Environment
From: Rebecca Sparks

Dear Chair Feldman, Vice Chair Kagan, and Members of the Committee on Energy, Education, and the Environment:

I am writing to ask you to support SB0116 and require thorough analysis of the energetic, environmental, and economic impact of data centers before constructing them or connecting them to the electrical grid. I recently submitted a few other pieces of written testimony in which I highlighted my expertise as an Environmental Scientist. While I do come to this issue through that lens, I also want to speak to you simply as a young person that you represent.

I am in my late twenties. In my lifetime, we have gone from controversial whispers about Global Warming, to a more accurately named but equally disparaged concept of Climate Change, and now - thanks to decades of misinformation and inaction - we are in the thick of the Climate Crisis. Nomenclature aside, do you remember what Maryland's seasons used to be like? I used to play in 2-3 feet of snow in the famous Hereford-Zone winters. We used to have to put our winter coats on underneath our Halloween costumes. I remember galaxies of fireflies, dazzling in summer evenings. Monarch butterflies used to build chrysalises on the siding of my parents home. Do you remember? Now, we have longer and longer droughts in the summer, and the fireflies and butterflies are more sparse. Last October, it was over 80 degrees for most of the month. A few inches of snow is seen as a major storm. From elementary school tree plantings to running climate model equations at Boston University, I have always tried to do something, to understand more, and to create community in and around nature. Along the way, I realized that many people - whether through failings in education, political manipulation, or willful ignorance - simply do not see that human beings are part of interdependent global systems. Please know that we depend on having balanced ecosystems, whether you realize it or not.

Throughout history, there are turning points for the trajectory of our ecosystems. The Industrial Revolution, the creation of the National Parks, the popularization of motor vehicles, the Clean Air Act, the Clean Water Act, the Endangered Species Act, the publication of Silent Spring by Rachel Carson, the Paris Climate Agreement, the USA's subsequent withdrawal from the Paris Climate Agreement, and so many more. At each of these moments, people in positions of power had a choice to make. They could

exploit resources for temporary profit and cause long-term degradation and loss of life. Or they could stand up, speak out for those whose voices are not heard, and preserve natural resources for future generations. We have seen it go both ways, time and time again. Amid progress and regression, my generation is already paying the price for past investment in harmful exploitation: Asheville is destroyed by floods, LA burns to the ground, infrastructure crumbles under extreme weather, and all so fossil fuel companies can get rich.

With the sudden rise in Artificial Intelligence technologies, massive tech companies led by billionaires are trying to claim land and resources for their own benefit. While AI presents some exciting opportunities for technological advancement, its current demands are too great. Data Centers use as much energy as 80,000 homes, running 24/7 on fossil fueled electricity at a time when emissions reduction should be our top priority. They use millions of gallons of precious fresh water daily, depleting reservoirs and aquifers, while fresh water becomes more and more scarce. All of that for a technology that is so new and continuously changing in an unreliable market. Exorbitantly wealthy private companies *must* be prevented from exploiting our resources in this way.

This is your turning point. Do you choose a future where private companies can claim property and deplete resources just to leave us in the dust when they've used up what they can get? Or do you choose a future in which Maryland's natural resources are robustly protected by our legal systems? A future in which fresh water is prioritized for drinking, bathing, and cleaning, instead of cooling servers? A future where electricity is generated renewably, transported safely, and helps to decrease our dependence on fossil fuels? This is your turning point. Please, support Senate Bill 0116 and do what needs to be done to protect our planet and regulate data centers.

Thank you for your time,
Rebecca Sparks