



## **WRITTEN TESTIMONY**

**BILL NO.:** Senate Bill 34 – Certificate of Public Convenience and Necessity - Overhead Transmission Lines - Conservation Easements

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

**HEARING DATE:** February 13, 2025

**SPONSOR:** Senator Brooks

**POSITION:** Favorable

I respectfully submit this testimony in strong support of Senate Bill 34, which requires the Public Service Commission to evaluate the impact of proposed overhead transmission lines on conservation easements and consider alternative routes to mitigate harm. I urge a **favorable report** on this critical legislation, as it upholds Maryland's long-standing commitment to preserving its environment, rural heritage, and economic future.

### **Maryland's Legacy of Land Conservation**

Maryland has a proud and well-established history of preserving land to protect its environment, rural character, and economic viability. The state has implemented programs such as the Maryland Agricultural Land Preservation Foundation (MALPF), Rural Legacy Program, and Maryland Environmental Trust, which have safeguarded thousands of acres of farmland, forests, and waterways from unchecked development.

Baltimore, Carroll, and Frederick Counties exemplify the success of these conservation efforts, boasting rolling farmland, scenic landscapes, and vibrant rural communities that attract new residents and visitors alike. These lands contribute to Maryland's economy by sustaining agriculture, tourism, and outdoor recreation industries, all while enhancing quality of life.

Additionally, the Chesapeake Bay remains one of the state's most treasured natural resources. The conserved lands across Baltimore, Carroll, and Frederick Counties play an essential role in protecting the Bay's watershed, reducing runoff pollution, and ensuring the long-term health of Maryland's ecosystems and waterways. Allowing transmission lines to disrupt these landscapes would jeopardize decades of environmental protection efforts.



## The Environmental Damage of the Proposed Transmission Line

The transmission project under consideration would cause substantial environmental destruction. According to the routing study conducted for the Maryland Piedmont Reliability Project (MPRP), the proposed right-of-way (ROW) would impact:

- **51.1 acres of total wetlands**, including **10.1 acres of forested wetlands**
- **394.2 acres of forested lands**
- **101 stream and waterbody crossings**
- **245.8 acres of conservation easements**, including **224.6 acres protected under MALPF**
- **An additional 1,801.7 acres of conserved land within 500 feet of the ROW**, putting further strain on protected natural areas, increasing the risk of habitat fragmentation, and threatening the integrity of Maryland's long-standing conservation efforts

Beyond these direct impacts, the project threatens sensitive ecosystems, historic sites, and farmlands that have been protected for generations. The large-scale disturbance from construction and ongoing maintenance of overhead transmission lines would degrade local habitats, reduce biodiversity, and increase erosion, harming the Chesapeake Bay's delicate watershed.

## Harming Maryland's Economic Future

Maryland's natural beauty is a significant factor in attracting new residents, businesses, and tourists. The scenic landscapes of Baltimore, Carroll, and Frederick Counties, along with the iconic Chesapeake Bay, make Maryland a desirable place to live and work. The destruction caused by overhead transmission lines could discourage people from moving to these areas, leading to economic consequences such as:

- **Decreased property values** in rural and suburban communities
- **Reduced agricultural productivity** due to land disruptions
- **Weakened tourism and outdoor recreation industries**, which depend on Maryland's scenic and environmental integrity

A short-sighted decision to prioritize corporate infrastructure over conservation would ultimately harm Maryland's economic competitiveness and diminish the quality of life for its residents.



## Conclusion

Senate Bill 34 represents a necessary and prudent measure to ensure that Maryland's conservation easements and protected lands are not sacrificed for unnecessary infrastructure projects. Requiring the Public Service Commission to assess the impact of transmission lines on conservation easements and consider alternative routes is a reasonable and responsible step in preserving Maryland's environmental and economic future.

For these reasons, I respectfully urge the committee to issue a **favorable report** on SB0034.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

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