

Testimony in Support of SB 483
Presented by Bryan Price
Maryland State Senate Hearing on SB 483

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

Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony in strong support of Senate Bill 483 (SB 483). My name is Bryan Price, and I am a Maryland resident who has been deeply involved in efforts to ensure responsible energy infrastructure planning, particularly in response to the Maryland Piedmont Reliability Project (MPRP).

For far too long, transmission developers have been able to push forward massive, disruptive infrastructure projects with little to no regard for affected communities. SB 483 provides a long-overdue course correction by requiring the Maryland Public Service Commission (PSC) to fully evaluate alternatives before approving new transmission lines; a change that is both necessary and urgent.

The Maryland Piedmont Reliability Project (MPRP) is a prime example of why this legislation is needed. The project threatens to seize private land, devalue properties, and permanently alter communities across Maryland. Under the current regulatory framework, utilities can justify transmission expansion without seriously considering whether alternatives; such as upgrading existing infrastructure, using existing rights-of-way, or undergrounding lines; are viable. SB 483 changes that by ensuring that the PSC must examine these options first before any new transmission project is approved.

Currently, utilities are not required to explore existing infrastructure before pursuing new transmission corridors. SB 483 mandates that the PSC assess whether existing transmission lines; whether owned by the same company or another utility; could meet the energy demand before any new lines are considered. This requirement ensures that redundant and costly infrastructure projects are avoided, and that upgrades to the current grid are prioritized whenever possible.

SB 483 also compels the PSC to ensure that new transmission projects promote economic and efficient service, rather than burdening ratepayers with unnecessary costs. Too often, utilities pursue expansion not out of necessity, but because new infrastructure guarantees a return on investment. By requiring economic justification and thorough cost-benefit analysis, SB 483 protects Maryland residents from rate hikes caused by speculative and unnecessary transmission development.

Beyond economic considerations, this bill is essential to protecting historical, environmental, and agricultural areas. The MPRP and similar projects pose serious threats to farmland, conservation lands, and historically significant sites. SB 483 explicitly directs the PSC to prioritize preservation of these spaces, ensuring that transmission developers do not target rural and environmentally sensitive areas when alternative solutions exist.

Another crucial aspect of SB 483 is its requirement to consider planned growth areas and residential communities before approving new projects. The placement of high-voltage transmission lines through developing areas has significant negative consequences, reducing property values, disrupting local planning efforts, and deterring investment in these communities. This bill strengthens local authority by ensuring that zoning plans and regional development goals are factored into energy infrastructure decisions. Lower property values don't just impact individual homeowners; they have direct consequences on local school funding. Maryland's foundation funding model of education funding is based on property taxes. Already Baltimore and Carroll Counties are making significant cuts to their school systems. When property values decline due to intrusive infrastructure projects, school budgets, and consequently our students suffer. In a time of already uncertain educational funding, unnecessary transmission expansion threatens to undermine the stability and resources of our schools, impacting students, teachers, and the broader community.

A particularly important provision of SB 483 is its directive to evaluate reconductoring (upgrading) existing transmission lines instead of constructing new ones. Modernizing current transmission infrastructure with advanced conductors and technology can significantly increase capacity without requiring additional land use. By requiring the PSC to assess this option, SB 483 encourages smarter, less intrusive energy solutions.

Finally, SB 483 promotes undergrounding transmission lines as an alternative to overhead expansion. While undergrounding is often dismissed as too expensive, it offers long-term reliability benefits by reducing exposure to extreme weather and minimizing environmental and visual impacts. PSEG's repeated failures to quickly restore power after major weather events highlight the vulnerabilities of overhead transmission lines. Burying lines would significantly reduce the frequency and duration of outages, increasing grid resilience and protecting communities from prolonged blackouts. This legislation ensures that undergrounding is properly considered when planning new infrastructure.

The need for this reform is underscored by the failures of PSEG to explore viable

alternatives. When Delegate Nino Mangione questioned PSEG about whether they had examined the potential of utilizing existing infrastructure instead of constructing new transmission lines, PSEG admitted they had not even considered it. It was only after community pushback and political pressure that the company hastily produced a study to justify its original plan. This is unacceptable. Utilities must be held accountable for demonstrating the necessity of new projects rather than defaulting to large-scale, disruptive expansions that benefit their bottom line at the expense of Maryland residents.

But SB 483 gives us a way forward. By passing this bill, the Maryland General Assembly can shift the regulatory landscape to favor smart, community-first energy planning rather than rubber-stamping corporate-driven transmission projects.

The passage of SB 483 is a crucial step toward ensuring that Maryland prioritizes efficiency, sustainability, and community well-being in its energy policies. This bill does not oppose transmission expansion outright, but rather ensures that better solutions are pursued before new lines are approved.

I urge you to support SB 483 to protect Maryland's land, homeowners, and communities from unnecessary, harmful transmission projects.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,
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