



WRITTEN TESTIMONY

BILL NO.: Senate Bill 955 – Overhead Transmission Lines - Eminent Domain

COMMITTEE: Senate Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee

HEARING DATE: March 6, 2025

SPONSORS: Senators West

POSITION: Favorable

I respectfully submit this testimony in **strong support** of **Senate Bill 955**, which **prohibits the use of eminent domain for overhead transmission lines on land encumbered by conservation easements** and provides **essential protections for property owners** who suffer economic losses due to transmission projects. This bill is necessary to **safeguard Maryland's rural communities, farmland, and property rights from the reckless expansion of transmission infrastructure, particularly projects like the Maryland Piedmont Reliability Project (MPRP).**

The MPRP: A Billion-Dollar Boondoggle at Maryland's Expense

The proposed **Maryland Piedmont Reliability Project (MPRP)** is a prime example of why SB 955 is urgently needed. This project has an estimated **construction cost of \$424 million**, but its **guaranteed annual revenue for developers is an astronomical \$550 million per year**. This staggering profit will be extracted **at the expense of Maryland's landowners and communities**, all while providing **no direct benefit** to Maryland ratepayers. Instead, the energy transmitted would primarily **serve the growing fleet of data centers in Virginia**, reinforcing an inequitable system where **Maryland bears the burden while another state reaps the rewards**.

SB 955 ensures that **private landowners, farmers, and rural communities are not forced to surrender their land** to projects like the MPRP that offer no local benefits and devastate property values, farmland, and environmental resources.

Eminent Domain Should Not Be Used to Seize Protected Farmland

Maryland has invested heavily in **land conservation** through programs like the **Maryland Agricultural Land Preservation Foundation (MALPF)**, the **Rural Legacy Program**, and the **Maryland Environmental Trust**. These programs were designed to **permanently protect farmland, forests, and rural landscapes**—not to serve as placeholders for corporate energy transmission corridors.

Under the MPRP proposal:



- **245.8 acres of conservation easements would be condemned** for transmission infrastructure, including **224.6 acres protected under MALPF**.
- **1,801.7 acres of conserved land** would be directly impacted by construction activities.
- **303 access roads would be constructed, destroying an additional 140 acres** to accommodate **heavy equipment** for transmission line construction, further fragmenting farmland and disrupting local ecosystems.

SB 955 prevents the abuse of eminent domain in these areas, ensuring that **land set aside for conservation and agriculture remains protected, rather than being handed over to energy developers for profit-driven projects.**

Protecting Property Owners from Economic Harm

Beyond the direct land seizure, transmission lines and associated access roads have a **devastating effect on nearby property values**. Studies show that **homes and farms located near high-voltage transmission lines can lose up to 40% of their value**, creating **economic hardship for families and communities**.

Additionally, the destruction caused by **303 access roads**, which will consume **140 acres for construction staging and heavy equipment**, will leave behind permanent damage, including:

- **Soil compaction and erosion**, making farmland less productive.
- **Increased runoff and water contamination** in surrounding agricultural and residential areas.
- **Fragmentation of farm operations**, disrupting daily activities and making some properties unusable for agricultural purposes.

SB 955 allows property owners **within 500 feet of a condemned property to seek damages if their land value declines** due to a transmission project, ensuring they are not left to bear the financial burden alone. Additionally, the bill mandates that **landowners receive fair legal compensation**, including **reasonable attorney fees** when challenging eminent domain cases—ensuring that residents and farmers have a **fighting chance against powerful corporate utilities**.



A Smarter Path Forward for Maryland's Energy Future

Rather than paving the way for **more destructive and unnecessary overhead transmission projects**, Maryland should focus on **modern, sustainable alternatives** to meet energy demand, including:

- **Upgrading existing transmission lines** instead of building new ones.
- **Undergrounding** new transmission where necessary to reduce land and environmental impacts.
- **Expanding local energy generation**, including grid-enhancing technologies and distributed energy resources, to **reduce reliance on long-distance transmission**.

SB 955 is a **crucial step in protecting Maryland from becoming an energy wasteland for the sake of Virginia's data centers**. This bill aligns with Maryland's long-standing commitment to **property rights, farmland preservation, and responsible energy planning**.

Conclusion: Vote Yes on SB 955

The passage of SB 955 will **uphold Maryland's commitment to land conservation, protect property owners from economic losses, and prevent corporate overreach through eminent domain**. If we fail to act, projects like the MPRP will **set a dangerous precedent**, opening the door for **more unnecessary transmission expansion at the expense of our communities and environment**.

I urge the committee to issue a **favorable report** on SB 955 and stand with Maryland landowners, farmers, and rural communities in rejecting the reckless expansion of corporate transmission corridors.

Respectfully submitted,

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