

February 7, 2025

Chair Feldman, Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee  
2 West Miller Senate Office Building  
Annapolis, Maryland 21401

Dear Chair Feldman, Vice Chair Kagan, and members of the Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee

I strongly urge you to provide an UNFAVORABLE report on Senate Bill 399 Natural Resources - Wildland Areas - Overhead Transmission Lines for the following reasons:

**Environmental Impact:** These wildlands are home to critical ecosystems, wildlife habitats, and rare plant species. Allowing industrial-scale infrastructure like overhead transmission lines will fragment these areas, disrupt ecosystems, and endanger unique native flora and fauna. This means the permanent loss of critical services such as recreational opportunities, mental health promotion through connection with the natural world, and habitat for diverse forest, grassland, and aquatic plant and animal communities. Healthy forests are the backbone of watersheds that absorb stormwater, replenish and purify groundwater, and provide ecosystem services such as carbon sequestration, oxygen production, and biodiversity protection. We will lose their protection from the impacts of climate change, a loss we can ill afford as we see continually more damaging weather events, wildfires, and the impact of rising temperatures.

**Erosion of Conservation Protections:** By exempting certain areas in the Big Savage Mountain Wildland, Bear Pen Wildland, and Dan's Mountain Wildland from being designated as wildland areas, SB399 undermines decades of conservation efforts. Maryland's wildlands exist to ensure that future generations can enjoy the benefits of untouched natural spaces—a promise that this bill threatens to break. These lands were set aside as Forever Wild by our elected officials. Allowing exemptions to the set-aside now is a break of trust with the people of Maryland.

**Poor management of our State's natural resources:** This legislation will have devastating consequences for Maryland's protected natural areas. Exempting protected wildland areas from their designated protections to accommodate electrical transmission infrastructure is damaging for the reasons I previously stated and a dangerous precedent for future infrastructure projects targeting conservation lands. To think that some of these lands may be taken needlessly without considering other options is heartbreaking, unnecessary, and a poor management of our State's natural resources.

**Revenue loss:** Our Wild Lands are a significant source of revenue to the State. Wildlife are critical to Maryland's tourism industry. Wildlife watching in Maryland generates over \$450 million in economic activity annually in the State each year. This proposal could lead to revenue losses to local businesses and municipalities of millions of dollars.

**Alternatives exist:** While proponents claim this measure is necessary to address electricity reliability issues, better alternatives exist today. There are cleaner, more sustainable ways to address Maryland's energy reliability issues. For instance, distributed energy solutions, burying transmission lines, and optimizing existing transmission infrastructure are all viable options that do not require sacrificing our wildlands. Alternatives to this destructive plan have not been considered, a plan that has not even proposed to the Public Service Commission yet.

**Premature decision:** Exempting certain areas in the Big Savage Mountain Wildland, Bear Pen Wildland, and Dan's Mountain Wildland from being designated as wildland areas by this legislation, SB399, is

premature and unnecessary because no proposal for electrical transmission infrastructure has been proposed to the MD Public Service Commission yet. The decision to exempt these lands from wild land protections must be made in fully transparent public discussions with all of the information about the proposed electrical transmission project and the alternative approaches and routes available to the public.

**Precedent for Further Development:** Passing SB399 could open the floodgates for additional exceptions to wildland protections. If we allow these areas to be exploited for energy infrastructure, what's next? Mining? Commercial development?

The natural beauty of Maryland is not just a resource; it's part of our identity. From hikers on Big Savage Mountain to wildlife enthusiasts at Bear Pen, these wildlands belong to all of us. They deserve to remain protected, untouched by industrial development. Moreover, we cannot allow the chipping away of our protected land.

SB399 is not in our public interest. It jeopardizes the values we hold dear. Let's protect our wildlands today and for generations to come.

For the reasons detailed above I respectfully ask you to issue an UNFAVORABLE report on SB399.

Sincerely,

David Mosher

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