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Testimony in support of SB0189 - Eminent Domain – Agricultural and Conservation Easements
– Prohibited Taking

To: Judicial Proceedings Committee

From: Cortney Davis

Dear Chair Senator William C. Smith Jr., Vice Chair Senator Jeff Waldstreicher, and Members
of the Judicial Proceedings Committee,

My name is Cortney Davis, and I am a resident of Westminster, MD. I am writing to express my
support for SB0189 - Eminent Domain – Agricultural and Conservation Easements – Prohibited
Taking

Myself and my husband are the current owners of a portion of my husband's family farm that has
been in the family for 3 generations. A piece of land that we purchased with the intent of
building our forever home there knowing that the land surrounding us is in Agricultural
Preservation and would never be developed. Therefore, guaranteeing that we would have the
same unadulterated skyline and natural habitat to raise our family. Our plans now in a complete
upheaval as our farm, and the farms surrounding us that are in Agricultural Preservation, are in
the direct path of the proposed route for the Maryland Piedmont Reliability Project.

Protecting agricultural and conservation easements is vital for Maryland's future, offering long-
term benefits for the environment, economy, and communities across the state. These easements,
which are legal agreements that limit the development or alteration of land, play a crucial role in
safeguarding the natural and agricultural landscapes that define Maryland.

One of the most important reasons for preserving agricultural easements is to ensure the
continued viability of Maryland's farming industry. Agriculture has been a cornerstone of the
state's economy for generations, contributing billions of dollars and supporting thousands of
jobs. Agricultural easements help keep productive farmland in use by preventing it from being
sold for commercial or residential development. This not only secures local food production and
preserves Maryland's agricultural heritage, but it also supports the state's food security. As urban
sprawl spreads, farmland becomes more vulnerable to development, which reduces the land
available for future food production. By protecting these lands, we ensure that Maryland's future
food system remains sustainable and resilient.

Similarly, conservation easements are crucial for maintaining the state's natural beauty and
preserving its diverse ecosystems. Maryland is home to rich habitats, including wetlands, forests,
and riparian areas, which provide vital services such as clean water, wildlife habitat, and carbon
storage. These ecosystems are not only important for biodiversity but also for the health of the

Chesapeake Bay, a major natural resource for the state. Conservation easements protect sensitive areas from development, preserving critical lands that serve as buffers for water quality, reduce the impacts of flooding, and improve the health of the Bay and its tributaries.

Additionally, agricultural and conservation easements protect the land's ability to store carbon. Forests, wetlands, and farmland act as natural carbon sinks, absorbing carbon dioxide from the atmosphere and helping to maintain balance in the environment. This is particularly important as these lands can contribute to cleaner air and healthier ecosystems.

From a wildlife perspective, these easements provide critical habitat for a wide variety of species. Forests, wetlands, and meadows offer shelter, food, and breeding grounds for birds, mammals, amphibians, and insects. Maryland is home to diverse wildlife, and by preserving natural landscapes through conservation easements, the state ensures that these species continue to thrive. These protected areas create corridors for wildlife to move freely and safely, helping to maintain healthy and diverse populations across the state.

From a community perspective, preserving agricultural and conservation easements enhances the quality of life. These protected lands provide green spaces for recreation, contribute to mental and physical health, and preserve the aesthetic beauty of Maryland's rural areas. For many, these lands also offer a connection to the past and the natural world. In urbanizing areas, having protected open spaces becomes even more crucial for maintaining a sense of place, ensuring that future generations can enjoy the same landscapes and outdoor experiences that past generations have.

Finally, agricultural and conservation easements are an investment in Maryland's future. While these easements might involve upfront costs or tax incentives, the long-term benefits far outweigh them. They help stabilize property values, promote sustainable land management, and prevent the costly consequences of overdevelopment, such as traffic congestion, loss of biodiversity, and declining water quality. Moreover, these easements support the local economy by preserving the working landscapes that attract tourists and residents alike, ensuring that Maryland remains a desirable place to live, work, and visit.

In conclusion, protecting agricultural and conservation easements in Maryland is not just about preserving land—it's about ensuring a sustainable and prosperous future. These easements help maintain the state's agricultural productivity, protect its natural resources, and provide environmental, economic, and social benefits for all. In a time of rapid growth, safeguarding these lands is one of the most important steps Maryland can take to protect its heritage and secure its future.

I respectfully urge you to support SB0189 - Eminent Domain – Agricultural and Conservation Easements – Prohibited Taking and to advocate for its passage to guarantee that farmers and individuals are not taken advantage of.

Thank you for your time and attention to this important matter. If you have any questions or would like additional information, please feel free to contact me at cortneydavis28@gmail.com

or 443-605-5397. I appreciate your dedication to serving our community and look forward to seeing your leadership on this issue.

Sincerely,
Cortney Davis