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Testimony in Support of Senate Bill 189 Eminent Domain - Agricultural and Conservation Easements - Prohibited taking

To: Judicial Proceedings, Education, Energy, and Environment Committees From: Caroline Pembroke

Dear Chair Smith, Vice Chair Waldstreicher, and Members of the committee,

My name is Caroline Pembroke and I am a resident of Davidsonville, Maryland. I am writing to express my support for Senate Bill 189 Eminent Domain - Agricultural and Conservation Easements - Prohibited taking, which seeks to protect farmland and conservation lands from eminent domain taking.

The issue of eminent domain has been brought to the forefront of conversations in Maryland due to the ill-conceived Maryland Piedmont Reliability project which seeks to use eminent domain to acquire privately owned land, including but not limited to land in forestry, wetland, and farmland conservation. While my 28 acres of farm and forested land is not in the current path of destruction, my parents' and their neighbors are.

A primary motivation for many landowners to place land in a conservation is a deep-rooted commitment to environmental stewardship. Individuals who cherish their natural surroundings often recognize the importance of preserving habitats for wildlife and plants. By placing their land in conservation, they contribute to maintaining biodiversity and protecting ecosystems from urban development and industrialization. For instance, my parents have a significant portion of their forest placed in a forestry program to help protect native species and promote a healthy ecosystem, thereby ensuring that future generations, including their grandchildren can enjoy the most basic aspect of the outdoors- a tree.

The conversion of conservation land into commercial development, including powerlines, can lead to irreversible ecological damage. Studies have shown that urban sprawl often

results in habitat fragmentation, loss of biodiversity, and increased pollution. For instance, the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) highlights how coastal development can disrupt marine ecosystems. By allowing eminent domain to encroach on conservation areas, we risk exacerbating these environmental challenges and compromising the very resources we aim to protect.

Proponents of using eminent domain for conservation land often argue that economic development is crucial for community growth and resilience. They assert that infrastructure projects can create jobs, enhance local economies, and improve public services. However, this perspective often overlooks the long-term costs associated with such developments, including environmental degradation, loss of cultural heritage, and diminished quality of life. While economic development is undeniably important, it should not come at the expense of irreplaceable natural resources. Policymakers can seek alternatives to eminent domain that prioritize conservation while addressing community needs.

As the law currently stands, the only person whom land conservation stops from using the land, is the land owner themselves. I respectfully urge you to support Senate Bill 189 Eminent Domain - Agricultural and Conservation Easements - Prohibited taking and to advocate for its passage to protect and preserve the irreplaceable farms and land in Maryland

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. I appreciate your dedication to serving our community and look forward to seeing your leadership on this issue.

Sincerely,

Caroline Pembroke