

**BILL NO.:** Senate Bill 657 – Eminent Domain – Just Compensation – Fees and Costs

**COMMITTEE:** Senate Judicial Proceedings Committee

**HEARING DATE:** February 11, 2025

**SPONSOR:** Senators Ready, Gile, Salling, and Simonaire

**POSITION:** Favorable

**On behalf of Stop MPRP, Inc.,** I respectfully submit this testimony in strong support of Senate Bill 657, which ensures that landowners who have property taken through eminent domain receive full and fair compensation, including reimbursement for legal, expert, and other costs incurred in the condemnation process.

Stop MPRP, Inc. is a non-profit, non-partisan organization dedicated to protecting Maryland’s farmland, rural communities, and private property rights from unjust land seizures, such as those proposed under the Maryland Piedmont Reliability Project (MPRP). Our members—many of whom are landowners, farmers, and business owners—stand to be directly impacted by the misuse of eminent domain for transmission infrastructure that primarily benefits corporate interests over Maryland residents.

Eminent domain allows the government or authorized entities to seize private property for public use, but under current law, landowners are forced to bear the financial burden of defending their rights. Property owners must often pay out of pocket for legal representation, expert witnesses, and other necessary costs simply to ensure they receive just compensation. These expenses create an uneven playing field, where well-funded corporations and government agencies have the upper hand, while private landowners are pressured into accepting undervalued settlements.

SB 657 would correct this fundamental inequity by requiring that landowners be reimbursed for the legal and expert fees incurred in condemnation proceedings. By doing so, the bill:

- **Protects Maryland Property Owners** – Landowners should not suffer financial hardship while defending their constitutional property rights.
- **Ensures Fair Compensation** – Just compensation should account for all costs associated with the forced taking of property, not just the land’s fair market value.
- **Promotes Equitable Negotiations** – Condemning authorities will be incentivized to negotiate in good faith rather than forcing landowners into costly litigation.
- **Deters Unnecessary and Harmful Land Seizures** – By increasing the cost of condemnation for condemning authorities, this bill serves as a deterrent to speculative or unnecessary infrastructure projects that disproportionately target rural communities.

Without these critical protections, Maryland’s rural landowners— many of whom have stewarded their land for generations—will continue to be easy targets for large infrastructure projects that prioritize profits over communities. By ensuring that those facing eminent domain proceedings are fully compensated, Maryland can send a clear message that its landowners, farmers, and rural communities are not expendable. This law will help prevent future projects from unjustly targeting Maryland’s rural landscapes and will encourage responsible, community-focused infrastructure planning.

**Recommendation:** Stop MPRP, Inc. strongly urges the committee to issue a **favorable** report on SB 657 to ensure fairness, full compensation, and stronger protections for Maryland’s landowners against eminent domain abuses.

**Respectfully submitted,**

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