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Testimony in Support of HB1532

To: Environment and Transportation Committee; Education, Energy, and the Environment
From: Seth Furches

Dear Chair Korman, Feldman and Members of the Environment and Transportation Committee; Education, Energy, and the Environment,

My name is Seth, and I am a resident of Finksburg, MD. I am writing to express my support for HB1532, which seeks to protect Maryland's farmland from harmful development projects.

As a farmer in Carroll Co, I have seen firsthand the devastating impacts that poorly planned projects can have on our land and livelihoods. We farm completely naturally to help restore the land that years of poorly thought out deceptions have damaged.

Maryland's Maryland House Bill 1532 represents a meaningful step toward protecting rural communities, farmland, and local economies from the unintended consequences of large-scale energy and infrastructure expansion. By requiring deeper review of advanced technologies and alternative routing, the bill helps ensure that projects—especially those tied to transmission lines or high-demand users like data centers—are not simply pushed through the cheapest or most convenient path. Instead, it encourages smarter siting decisions that can reduce disruption to agricultural land, preserve open space, and respect existing land stewardship practices. For regenerative farmers in places like Carroll County, this kind of planning is critical to maintaining soil health, grazing systems, and long-term farm viability.

The bill also strengthens financial accountability by ensuring that large energy users bear the true costs of their infrastructure demands, rather than shifting those burdens onto everyday ratepayers. Provisions requiring that large-load customers—such as data centers—cover transmission and distribution buildout costs, along with safeguards like long-term contracts and penalties for project cancellations, protect local residents and small businesses from subsidizing massive corporate energy consumption. This is especially important in rural areas, where farms already operate on tight margins and are vulnerable to rising utility costs. By increasing scrutiny of cost structures and energy demand, HB1532 supports a more equitable system where growth does not come at the expense of local communities.

Finally, HB1532 improves transparency, oversight, and community engagement in the energy planning process. The bill expands reporting requirements, mandates ongoing consultation with state agencies, and encourages data centers and utilities to engage meaningfully with the

communities where they operate. This creates space for farmers, landowners, and rural residents to have a voice in decisions that directly affect their land and livelihoods. For a regenerative farm like mine, where the health of the ecosystem and community are deeply connected, this kind of accountability ensures that future development aligns more closely with environmental stewardship, local resilience, and responsible growth.

While some opponents of Maryland House Bill 1532 argue that increased oversight and review requirements could slow down infrastructure development or discourage investment—particularly from large energy users like data centers—these concerns are largely overstated. Thoughtful review of routing, technology, and long-term impacts does not halt progress; it ensures that growth is done responsibly and with full consideration of consequences. In fact, projects that are better planned from the start are less likely to face costly delays, legal challenges, or community pushback later, ultimately saving time and resources.

Others suggest that stricter cost-allocation rules could make Maryland less competitive for large-scale development. However, requiring high-demand users to bear the true cost of their energy needs simply creates a fair marketplace. It prevents the hidden subsidization of corporate infrastructure by residents, farmers, and small businesses—groups that can least afford rising utility costs. This approach doesn't deter responsible investment; it attracts companies willing to operate transparently and sustainably within the communities they impact.

Finally, some critics raise concerns about increased reporting and community engagement requirements being burdensome. In reality, these provisions are foundational to good governance. When communities—especially rural and agricultural ones—are given a seat at the table, projects are more likely to reflect local needs and avoid unnecessary harm. For farmers and land stewards, this transparency is not a barrier but a safeguard, ensuring that development aligns with long-term environmental health, property rights, and the resilience of local economies.

I respectfully urge you to Support HB1532 and to advocate for its passage to preserve our farmland and protect Maryland's natural heritage.

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

Sincerely,
Seth Furches