



February 24, 2026

Testimony on **SB 683**  
Solar Siting and Preservation Credit Act  
Senate Education, Energy and the Environment  
Position: **Favorable with Amendments**

Chair Feldman, Vice Chair Kagan, and Members of the Committee,

On behalf of the Eastern Shore Land Conservancy (ESLC), we write in support of Senate Bill 683, the Solar Siting and Preservation Credit Act of 2026. We appreciate the bill's recognition that where solar energy generating stations are located matters, and that Priority Preservation Areas (PPAs) warrant thoughtful treatment in statewide siting policy.

ESLC has long supported Maryland's leadership in both agricultural land preservation and responsible renewable energy development. We believe SB 683 provides a meaningful opportunity to strengthen alignment between these two important public commitments. To that end, we respectfully request consideration of a clarifying amendment concerning the calculation of the 5% acreage limitation for solar energy generating stations within Priority Preservation Areas.

Under last year's Renewable Energy Certainty Act, solar development within PPAs established before January 1, 2025, is limited to 5% of the total acreage of the PPA. However, current calculations include acreage already permanently preserved under conservation easements within PPAs. These include lands protected through the Maryland Agricultural Land Preservation Foundation (MALPF), the Rural Legacy Program, the Maryland Environmental Trust, county preservation programs, and qualified land trusts.

Including permanently preserved acreage in the denominator of the 5% calculation has the unintended consequence of allowing a larger share of unprotected farmland to be converted to solar development. In effect, the more successful a county has been in preserving land, the more additional land becomes eligible for conversion. We do not believe that outcome reflects the intent of either Maryland's farmland preservation framework or the Renewable Energy Certainty Act.

Priority Preservation Areas were created to anchor long-term agricultural viability, safeguard large contiguous blocks of working lands, and ensure that significant public investments in preservation are not undermined by incompatible land uses. Conservation easements represent permanent, legally binding commitments to keep land in agricultural or natural resource use in perpetuity. Counting those acres toward the 5% solar conversion base weakens the practical integrity of that commitment.





ESLC therefore proposes an amendment to §7-218(h)(4) clarifying that acreage encumbered by permanent conservation easements held by MALPF, the Rural Legacy Program, the Maryland Environmental Trust, county governments, the State of Maryland, or qualified land trusts may not be included in the total acreage base used to calculate the 5% limitation.

This amendment would:

- Honor existing legal protections and taxpayer investments;
- Preserve the agricultural integrity and long-term viability of PPAs;
- Maintain policy consistency between renewable energy siting and land preservation statutes; and
- Strengthen public trust in the permanence of conservation easements.

Importantly, the amendment would not reduce the 5% cap, prohibit solar energy generating stations in PPAs, or disrupt approved projects. It would simply ensure that the 5% limitation is calculated using acreage that is actually eligible for conversion. In doing so, it reinforces the original purpose of Priority Preservation Areas while preserving the balance struck by the Renewable Energy Certainty Act.

Maryland has long been a national leader in farmland preservation. As solar deployment expands to meet our climate and energy goals, it is essential that renewable energy policy and land conservation policy advance together, not at each other's expense.

We respectfully urge favorable consideration of SB 683 with the proposed clarifying amendment. We would welcome the opportunity to provide draft language or meet with you to discuss this issue further.

Thank you for your leadership and continued commitment to protecting Maryland's working landscapes.

Sincerely,

Carol Bean  
Land Use & Policy Manager

