



FWA for HB120

1/30/2026

Chair Korman, Vice Chair Guyton, and Honorable Members of the E&T Committee:

My name is Benjamin Ford, and I serve as the Miles-Wye Riverkeeper for ShoreRivers. Thank you for the opportunity to testify in strong support of House Bill 120.

ShoreRivers works to protect Maryland's Eastern Shore waterways through science-based advocacy, restoration, education, and engagement. We strongly support the intent behind HB 120 to pause and reassess hyperscale data center development in Maryland. The rapid expansion of these facilities raises serious concerns about impacts on ratepayers, water resources, air quality, and land use. A temporary moratorium, coupled with thoughtful planning, is both reasonable and necessary.

However, as currently written, HB 120 links that moratorium to a contingency that effectively encourages the co-location of data centers with new or expanded natural gas generation. This approach risks becoming a backdoor pathway for expanding some of the most carbon-intensive and polluting forms of energy generation in the state.

Natural gas facilities, along with extensive diesel backup systems commonly associated with data centers, impose well-documented public health and environmental costs. These impacts fall disproportionately on surrounding communities and contribute to respiratory illness, degraded air quality, and long-term healthcare expenses. Expanding fossil fuel infrastructure in service of private data center demand undermines Maryland's climate commitments and public health goals.

Moreover, this approach is unlikely to deliver meaningful relief to average Maryland ratepayers. Power generated to serve colocated data centers is typically dedicated to private, high-demand users rather than integrated into the broader grid. As a result, residential and small-business customers are left to shoulder rising infrastructure and transmission costs without receiving corresponding reliability benefits.

At the same time, cleaner and more cost-effective alternatives remain underutilized. Utility-scale solar, battery storage, demand response, and grid modernization projects are among the fastest and least expensive ways to increase capacity and reliability. Many such projects are already positioned for development but face regulatory and market barriers. HB 120 does not prioritize or require consideration of these solutions.

If Maryland's goals are to strengthen grid reliability, control costs, and reduce emissions, then policies should focus on accelerating carbon-neutral and low-impact generation, not expanding fossil fuel dependence. Linking data center development to new gas infrastructure moves the state in the opposite direction.

ShoreRivers

Isabel Hardesty, Executive Director
Annie Richards, Chester Riverkeeper | Matt Pluta, Choptank Riverkeeper
Ben Ford, Miles Wye Riverkeeper | Zack Kelleher, Sassafras Riverkeeper

shorerivers.org | 443.385.0511 | info@shorerivers.org

For these reasons, ShoreRivers supports HB 120 **with amendments** that would:

- Remove incentives for new or expanded fossil fuel generation;
- Prioritize carbon-neutral and renewable co-generation options;
- Require serious evaluation of solar, storage, and demand-side solutions; and
- Establish a clear, time-limited planning process focused on minimizing environmental and ratepayer impacts.

With these changes, HB 120 could serve as a meaningful tool for responsible energy and land-use planning. Without them, the bill risks locking Maryland into expensive, polluting infrastructure that does little to serve the broader public.

Maryland has invested heavily in Chesapeake Bay restoration, climate resilience, and public health protection. Allowing hyperscale development to drive new fossil fuel expansion undermines that investment. We have an opportunity now to choose a smarter path—one that supports innovation without sacrificing our communities and natural resources.

On behalf of ShoreRivers and the communities we serve, I respectfully urge the Committee to issue a **favorable report with amendments** on HB 120. **Without amendments, we will oppose this bill.** Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,



Benjamin Ford, Miles-Wye Riverkeeper, on behalf of ShoreRivers