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Testimony in Support with Amendments

House Bill 460 - Solar Energy - Construction of Generating Stations in Priority Preservation Areas and Study
Environment and Transportation Committee
February 10, 2026

The Rural Maryland Council supports House Bill 460 with Amendments - Solar Energy - Construction of Generating Stations in Priority Preservation Areas and Study, which takes an important step toward balancing Maryland's renewable energy goals with the protection of agricultural and conservation lands. The bill reduces the percentage of priority preservation area acreage eligible for certain solar energy generating stations from 5% to 2% and directs the Maryland Department of the Environment to study the environmental impacts associated with the disposal of solar photovoltaic systems.

Maryland's transition to renewable energy is essential, but it must be pursued in a manner that respects the purpose of priority preservation areas. These lands were designated to protect farmland, support agricultural economies, and preserve rural landscapes. Allowing excessive development of large-scale solar facilities in these areas risks permanently removing productive agricultural land from use and undermining long-term land preservation efforts.

Rural communities are frequently asked to host energy infrastructure due to their available land and proximity to natural resources. While rural Maryland can play a role in supporting clean energy generation, this role should not come at the expense of agricultural sustainability or local land-use priorities. By limiting solar development in priority preservation areas, House Bill 460 encourages more appropriate siting decisions while maintaining the integrity of preserved farmland.

The Rural Maryland Council requests an amendment to ensure that the bill explicitly requires a study of the environmental impacts of solar photovoltaic systems. Evaluating potential effects related to installation, operation, and end-of-life management will help ensure that Maryland's renewable energy expansion proceeds in an environmentally responsible and sustainable manner.

The Rural Maryland Council respectfully requests your favorable support with amendments of House Bill 460.