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Testimony in Support of HB1244/SB0630, Overhead Transmission Lines and Eminent Domain - Property Value - Damages

To: Environment and Transportation and Economic Matters Committees

My name is Lisa Wright and I am a resident of Manchester, MD. I am writing in support of HB1244/SB0630, as mentioned above, which allows property owners within 300 ft of new overhead transmission lines to seek damages in eminent domain proceedings in the form of both counsel fees and diminished property values.

I currently live in a home that is projected to be within 300 ft of the Maryland Piedmont Reliability Project overhead transmission lines. I have suffered at the expense of the project already, through taking time off work to be home for surveys, legal fees already expended, and the stress of not knowing what impact this proposal will have on my family's life, and it hasn't even been approved. When a path for an overhead transmission line is chosen, the property owners have no choice or input in the decision. Once you have been selected to be in the path of a line, in order to be compensated for the loss of your property value you must have intimate knowledge of the proceedings and processes involved, and general legal experience. The average person, myself included, does not have the knowledge or experience to take on the companies that do this everyday, so need to hire attorneys and specialists. The companies have attorneys on staff and experience with these proceedings, they have an immediate advantage and the ability to fund proceedings for a long period of time and overextend individuals. The eminent domain and condemnation proceedings can be costly, attorneys charging hourly or taking a substantial cut of the damages awarded. These costs, combined with the costs expended prior to the eminent domain proceedings and loss of property value have a huge negative financial impact on individual owners. The overhead transmission lines will ultimately devalue the property in question, potentially creating negative equity for those who have mortgages.

This bill will allow assigned owners the ability to recoup some of their expenses lost and understand that any damages awarded will not be immediately diminished by legal fees. Allowing these fees to be recouped may help prevent property owners from owing more on their mortgages than their property is worth. Additionally, the companies pursuing eminent domain may be less inclined to carry out long proceedings if they are required to carry the financial burden of both parties, perhaps even encouraging more prior settlements and avoiding legal proceedings altogether. Ultimately this bill will enable property owners to have hope and know

that by being chosen to be within 300 ft of these lines, they will be fairly compensated without carrying the financial burden of the choice that was not theirs in the first place.

Some may say that these projects are often funded by federal dollars and that any additional expenses to the company may be passed down to the taxpayers. However, these additional expenses should be budgeted in with the cost of these projects. Each property owner within 300 ft of the transmission line is a taxpayer and is currently paying the price three-fold for these projects: once in their taxes and electricity bills, a second time in the attorney fees, and a third time by giving up part of their property, viewshed, or quiet enjoyment.

Ultimately this is a bill that will support property owners in the state and protect them, in part, from undue expenses. I support HB1244/SB0630 and hope that it finds smooth passage.

Thank you for your time and attention. If you have any additional questions please feel free to contact me at the email address above. Thank you for serving our community.

Sincerely,
Lisa Wright