



POTOMAC
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Written Testimony in Support of House Bill 1411: Data Center Impact Transparency and Planning Act

Environment and Transportation Committee
March 10, 2026

Dear Chair Korman and Members of the Committee:

Position: FAVORABLE

Potomac Riverkeeper Network strongly supports House Bill 1411 because it provides essential transparency and environmental planning for the growing development of large-scale data centers in Maryland—particularly within the Potomac River watershed.

The Potomac River and its tributaries provide drinking water for millions of people across Maryland, Virginia, and the District of Columbia. Protecting the health of this watershed is therefore a matter of both environmental protection and public health.

At the same time, Maryland is seeing increased interest in locating large data center facilities within the Potomac watershed and surrounding counties. These facilities represent a new category of industrial-scale development with significant demands on energy, water, and land.

Potomac Riverkeeper Network recognizes that data center development is occurring and will likely continue to occur. However, the pace of this development—and the scale of the facilities involved—means that it is essential that projects be evaluated carefully, transparently, and with full consideration of their potential impacts on Maryland’s waterways and drinking water supplies.

House Bill 1411 helps ensure that this evaluation occurs.

Data Centers Are Large Industrial Facilities

Although often described as technology campuses, modern hyperscale data centers operate much more like industrial facilities.



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These facilities require enormous electrical infrastructure, large-scale cooling systems, extensive backup power generation, and significant land development. Individual buildings can be hundreds of thousands of square feet in size and operate continuously.

Because of these operational demands, data center developments may include:

- Large electrical substations and transmission connections
- Dozens of diesel backup generators and fuel storage systems
- Extensive cooling systems using water or specialized industrial chemicals
- Large areas of cleared land and impervious surfaces

These characteristics make it essential that data centers be evaluated as **large industrial developments with potentially significant environmental impacts**, particularly when they are proposed in sensitive watersheds.

The Potomac Watershed Requires Special Protection

The Potomac River watershed is one of the most important water resources in the Mid-Atlantic region.

Tributaries throughout Maryland—including streams in Montgomery, Frederick, and Prince George's Counties—eventually flow into the Potomac River and ultimately supply drinking water to millions of residents.

Industrial development within these tributaries can introduce pollutants that travel downstream into the river system.

Data center facilities introduce several potential pathways for water pollution, including:

- Diesel fuel storage and generator systems
- Industrial cooling and cleaning chemicals
- Sediment and pollutant runoff during large-scale construction
- Increased stormwater runoff from extensive impervious surfaces

These risks are particularly important to consider in areas upstream of drinking water supplies and sensitive aquatic ecosystems.

Redevelopment of Contaminated Sites Raises Additional Risks

Another issue that makes House Bill 1411 particularly important is the increasing interest in locating data center developments on previously contaminated industrial sites or brownfield properties.

While redevelopment of contaminated sites can sometimes be beneficial, it can also present additional environmental risks—especially when major construction and excavation are required.

Large-scale site grading, excavation, and infrastructure installation associated with data center development can disturb contaminated soils, buried waste materials, or groundwater contamination that may exist at these sites.

If not carefully evaluated and managed, these activities can mobilize pollutants that may migrate into nearby streams, groundwater, or drinking water sources.

In the Potomac watershed, where many tributaries flow directly into drinking water supplies, disturbing contaminated sites without comprehensive environmental evaluation could create serious downstream risks.

House Bill 1411 helps ensure that these issues are examined carefully before projects move forward.

Water Supply and Water Use Concerns

Data centers can also require significant water supplies for cooling operations.

In some cases, individual facilities may use very large quantities of water annually. When multiple facilities are developed in the same region, the cumulative demand on local water systems can become substantial.

For communities located within the Potomac watershed, this raises important questions about how large industrial water demands may affect local streams, aquifers, and drinking water resources.

Yet in many cases, key information about water use and cooling technologies is not fully disclosed during early planning stages.

HB1411 helps ensure that these impacts are evaluated transparently so that communities and decision-makers can understand the potential implications for local water resources.

Transparency Is Essential

Another challenge associated with data center development is the limited transparency surrounding many proposals.

Key details regarding water use, energy demand, cooling technologies, and environmental impacts are sometimes withheld due to claims of proprietary technology or confidentiality agreements.

This lack of transparency can leave local governments and communities without the information needed to fully evaluate the potential environmental consequences of these projects.

House Bill 1411 helps address this issue by requiring disclosure and evaluation of key environmental impacts so that decisions can be made with complete and accurate information.

Transparency does not prevent development. Instead, it ensures that development occurs responsibly and with appropriate protections for communities and natural resources.

Responsible Development Must Protect Maryland's Waterways

Potomac Riverkeeper Network recognizes that data centers are part of the modern economy and that Maryland will continue to see development pressure from this industry.

However, development in sensitive watersheds—particularly the Potomac River watershed—must occur in a way that protects drinking water supplies, aquatic ecosystems, and downstream communities.

House Bill 1411 helps ensure that as these facilities are proposed and developed, their impacts on water resources are properly understood and evaluated.

Conclusion

The Potomac River and its tributaries are vital natural resources that support drinking water, recreation, fisheries, and ecosystems throughout Maryland and the greater region.

As large-scale data center development begins to expand within Maryland, it is essential that projects be evaluated with transparency and careful consideration of their potential impacts on waterways and drinking water supplies.

House Bill 1411 provides an important step toward ensuring that these impacts are fully understood before major development decisions are made.

For these reasons, Potomac Riverkeeper Network respectfully urges a **favorable report on House Bill 1411**.

Thank you for your consideration,

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