

HB1534 – Data Centers – Standards for Operation and Siting

DATE: March 10, 2026

COMMITTEE: House Environment and Transportation Committee

POSITION: Favorable

FROM: Elizabeth J. Law. P.E. (retired)

Chair Marc Korman, Vice-Chair Michele Guyton and Committee Members,

I strongly urge the House Environment and Transportation Committee to give HB1534 a favorable report to create stronger standards for data center development in Maryland.

I am a resident of Frederick Maryland. I am seeing firsthand the current distress during construction of the largest data center hub in Maryland. I worry for my neighbors given the insufficient regulations that have been enacted. As an electric power engineer and advocate for the environment I have been promoting better regulations of the emergency diesel generators used by data centers.

In an effort to attract business from data centers, most of our county officials chose to provide standards that are too loose to truly protect the residents and school children who will be breathing the emissions and particulates, hearing the noise and feeling the vibrations of the diesel generators during testing and worse case during an emergency when all the diesel generators on site will be operating at once.

This bill provides stronger regulations on data centers and importantly provides enforcement mechanisms. Some data center operators will prove to be good neighbors, some will not. That is why standards without enforcement are just wishful thinking.

HB1534 sets strong – and urgently needed – standards for data centers proposed in proximity to schools, including setbacks for electrical substations and transmission lines, and strong air quality monitoring provisions.

HB1534 creates strong sound and vibration monitoring requirements, including addressing the critical dB(C) issue. This is a measurement of lower frequency sound disturbances, often characterized as the low, throbbing noise that travels far, and penetrates walls and greatly impacts the daily lives of those living near data centers.

HB1534 limits when backup diesel generators can be tested, avoiding harmful noise and air pollution impacts on nearby schools and residences.

HB1534 also establishes a critical new requirement for on-site battery storage for data centers with higher electricity requirements, reducing, if not eliminating, the need for noisy and polluting diesel generators.

It should be noted that utility scale batteries and other emergency backup supply systems (BESS) are now on the market. These systems could provide the first 4 hours of emergency power, giving the data center operator time to move processing activities to a sister data center outside the outage area. Most outages last less than 4 hours, sometimes much less. These are outages that would not require the operation of diesel generators.

I applaud the HB1534 provision enabling emergency stop work orders, higher and more meaningful fines, and permit revocation for data center operators who flout the restrictions.

Finally, HB1534 sets a strong and reasonable standard for where data centers should NOT be located – on prime farm soils, on land under preservation easements, or on land within a Rural Legacy Area.

For these reasons and more, I strongly support this bill and urge you to report a favorable recommendation.

Sincerely,

Elizabeth J. Law, P.E. (retired)