

February 13, 2026

Delegate Jheanelle Wilkins, Chair
House Ways and Means Committee
Taylor House Office Building
Room 130
Annapolis, Maryland 21401

Bill: House Bill 734 - Property Tax - Agricultural Use Assessment - Community Solar Energy Generating Systems
Position: Support

Dear Chair Wilkins and members of the Committee:

Lightstar develops, builds, and owns community solar projects with more than 2000 megawatts (MW) of projects completed or in development across the country. Of that 2000 MW portfolio, nearly 500 MWs are agrivoltaics. In Maryland, we have 121 MWs of agrivoltaics under development across approximately 14 counties. Lightstar diligently works with Maryland's local, state, and federal policymakers to communicate the benefits of preferred siting methods like agrivoltaics, which is the integration of agricultural and/or horticultural production and solar on a single parcel of land.

As one of the first developers to bring crop agrivoltaics (hay, soy, wheat, etc.) to Maryland, Lightstar is committed to responsible design standards that ensure our projects provide robust agricultural and clean energy benefits. Responsible agrivoltaics can help ensure farmland remains in production for the lifetime of the community solar project and provide additional food security and agricultural economic growth – despite incredible headwinds. While doing so, low-and-moderate income households will receive additional energy bill savings as part of the Community Solar Program subscriber requirements. Community solar provides both homeowners and renters, and even businesses, with equal access to the cost-saving benefits of solar energy. While Maryland addresses an energy affordability crisis and increased land development pressures, agrivoltaics provides Marylanders with different choices when it comes to solar. Agrivoltaics helps protect food security, farmland retention, and the agricultural heritage of many communities.

Agrivoltaic projects allow farming operations to continue on important soils, while also integrating the benefits of community solar. Because these projects must continue to receive agricultural tax assessments, **they are guaranteed to continue farming for at least the lifetime of the solar array (25-30 years) and are meeting the requirements of any other farm in the State of Maryland.** Agrivoltaics can help farming families keep their agricultural operations financially viable with creative solutions. Many of our projects ensure both landowners and tenant farmers can continue to use land for agriculture while saving for retirement, enticing the

next generation to stay on the farm, finding additional financial stability, or meeting other goals like trying new and innovative farming practices.

HB734 seeks to align different sections of statute to ensure a smooth path to agrivoltaics implementation. Currently, agrivoltaics projects in the permanent community solar program in Maryland are subject to the statutory definition of agrivoltaics in Public Utilities Statute 7-306.2, which:

- Requires the simultaneous use of areas of land for both solar and agriculture,
- Requires a project to maintain agricultural use assessment by the standards of COMAR 18.02.03 or the Maryland Assessment Procedures Manual, and;
- Does NOT include pollinator habitat or apiaries as qualifying agricultural uses.

Agri-voltaics projects are also governed in the following statutes:

- Tax-Property Statute 8-209 allows land used for agrivoltaics to be assessed and qualified as land that is actively used for farm and agricultural purposes (agricultural use assessment), if approved on or before December 31, 2025.
- Agri-voltaic community solar projects may qualify for a county/municipal personal property tax exemption, if approved on or before December 31, 2030 and do not exceed 5MWs, under [Tax-Property Statute 7-237](#). This tax benefit requires projects to serve at least 50% low-and-moderate income (LMI) subscribers and to provide them with at least a 20% energy bill discount. §7-237.
- Agri-voltaic community solar projects may co-locate up to 10MWs, under [Public Utilities Statute 7.306.2](#).

HB734 seeks to amend §8-209 to align the qualification period for agricultural use assessment with the personal property tax exemption found in §7-237 by extending the sunset for agricultural use assessment qualification to December 31, 2030. This change is minor in nature but will allow multi-beneficial agrivoltaic projects to move forward with certainty. Aligning both elements of property tax statute is prudent to ensure a consistent framework for the compliance and incentive mechanisms associated with agrivoltaics.

Most importantly, because the community solar program requires that agrivoltaic projects maintain agricultural use assessment, the ability for these projects to qualify as such should be extended to 2030 to allow the program sufficient runway to implement agrivoltaics. It's critical to note that the development timeline for agrivoltaic projects is much longer when compared to traditional community solar. Agri-voltaic projects require greater coordination and planning to ensure both the solar and farming aspects of the projects work in concert.

In summary, HB734 harmonizes qualification deadlines found in both §8-209 and §7-237 and provides reasonable program runway to implement agrivoltaics. Harmonizing these dates and extending the qualification period for agricultural use assessment creates a sensible runway

to finance and build complex agrivoltaic projects, which supports dual-use agriculture. Harmonizing both statutes at 2030 reduces risk and simplifies guidance for the Department of Assessments and Taxation, local assessors, and the Public Service Commission, reducing compliance errors and disputes over which projects qualify.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify on HB734. We respectfully ask the Committee for a favorable report on House Bill 734. Please do not hesitate to reach out to me with any questions.

Sincerely,



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