

Thursday, February 29, 2024

TO: C. T. Wilson, Chair of the House Economic Matters Committee; Ben Barnes, Chair of the House Appropriations Committee, and Committee Members

FROM: Mariana Rosales, The Nature Conservancy, Director of Climate; Cait Kerr, The Nature Conservancy, State Policy Manager

POSITION: Support HB 1328 Solar Energy and Energy Storage - Development and State Procurement

The Nature Conservancy (TNC) supports HB 1328 offered by Delegates Ziegler and Crosby. HB 1328 establishes Utility-Scale Solar Design and Siting Commission, to provide recommendations related to solar energy development and land conservation and preservation. The bill also sets requirements for cover crop plantings and maintenance on land where ground-mounted solar energy stations larger than a set size are located, seeks to expand solar development, and establishes a conservation and restoration fund that solar developers will be required to pay into if their solar project is located on land zoned for agriculture or silviculture.

Maryland needs to accelerate our renewable energy rollout in order to meet our goals under the Renewable Portfolio Standard and the Climate Solutions Now Act. Simultaneously, it is important to preserve our forested and agricultural lands, which provide carbon sinks as well as adaptation and resilience benefits. Historically, solar development and land preservation have been conflicting objectives, but that paradigm is evolving. At TNC, we believe it is not only possible but also necessary to pursue both; however, in order to do so, we need integrative, creative approaches to pursue smart solar energy deployment.

Solar energy is one of the cleanest electricity sources available in our state, but its land usage can be intensive and there must be guidance to prevent negative impacts. HB 1328 takes this into consideration and includes some potential safeguards to minimize impacts on areas of conservation, restoration, agricultural, environmental, or historical importance.

TNC commends Delegates Ziegler and Crosby on introducing this bill, which seeks to expand solar energy deployment while also establishing safeguards to protect preserved lands.

Therefore, we urge a favorable report on HB 1328.