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Letter of Information

House Bill 1328 – Solar Energy and Energy Storage - Development and State Procurement  
House Economic Matters Committee  
February 29, 2024

**The Rural Maryland Council submits the following letter of information on House Bill 1328 – Solar Energy and Energy Storage - Development and State Procurement.**

The Rural Maryland Council sees renewable energy development as potential to stimulate economic opportunity in rural areas. However, the Council has concerns about the impact of this type of development as it relates to land use conversion and loss of productive land. Large-scale solar installations can require significant land area, leading to the conversion and loss of productive agricultural and forested lands. This can have major implications for food production, timber harvesting, and rural economies dependent on these land uses. The Council would like House Bill 1328 to consider minimizing the impact on these landscapes and prohibit the use of solar generation on farmland that contains Class I and Class II primary agricultural soils and any practices that promote solar development on forested lands.

The Rural Maryland Council would like to see the promotion of incentivizing innovative technologies, like agrivoltaics, which is the sharing of agricultural activity and solar power generation on land. For example, promoting raised solar panels that would support animal grazing or growing crops can be an effective way to mitigate the impact of solar energy on agricultural land. This is one of the many avenues of mitigation that can be explored, and we are interested in learning more.

Additionally, there is also interest in exploring ways to provide support and assistance to landowners who may be impacted by the development of solar energy projects. The Council believes that landowners should be given a voice in the development process and that their rights should be protected.

The Rural Maryland Council is deeply committed to protecting agricultural land and ensuring that it continues to play a vital role in the economic and social fabric of rural communities. The Council supports efforts to move towards a renewable portfolio and is committed to working collaboratively with all stakeholders to ensure that this transition is carried out in a way that is fair, sustainable, and respectful of local communities and the environment.

The Rural Maryland Council (RMC) is an independent state agency governed by a nonpartisan, 40-member board that consists of inclusive representation from the federal, state, regional, county, and municipal governments, as well as the for-profit and nonprofit sectors. We bring together federal, state, county, and municipal government officials as well as representatives of the for-profit and nonprofit sectors to identify challenges unique to rural communities and to craft public policy, programmatic or regulatory solutions.

*“A Collective Voice for Rural Maryland”*