



Committee: Environment and Transportation

HB460: Solar Energy – Construction of Generating Stations in Priority Preservation Areas and Study

Hearing Date: February 10, 2026

Position: FAVORABLE

For more than three decades, Eastern Shore Land Conservancy has worked with farmers, landowners, local governments, and the State of Maryland to permanently protect productive farmland, conserve natural resources, and sustain the rural landscapes that define the Eastern Shore.

We recognize and support the State's commitment to expanding renewable energy generation and addressing climate change. At the same time, we believe it is essential that renewable energy deployment be carefully balanced with long-standing farmland preservation goals, particularly in areas that the State has explicitly designated for agricultural and conservation priority.

House Bill 460 provides an important and measured adjustment to that balance.

Priority Preservation Areas (PPAs) were established to concentrate public and private investment in agricultural land protection. These areas reflect decades of policy choices, taxpayer funding, and voluntary landowner participation aimed at keeping farmland viable, contiguous, and available for future generations.

On the Eastern Shore, PPAs often encompass the region's most productive soils, largest farm operations, and strongest agricultural economies. They are not simply open land; they are working landscapes that support food production, local jobs, and associated industries.

Keeping prime farm soils in food production will only become more important as climate impacts intensify. The recently released *Maryland Climate-Smart Agriculture: Roadmap to Resilience* from the Harry R. Hughes Center for Agroecology projects that nearly 44,000 acres of Maryland agricultural land could become unsuitable for crop production by 2070 due to saltwater intrusion alone.



As climate change steadily reduces the total amount of land capable of producing food, protecting the *most productive* soils becomes not optional—but essential.

Allowing large-scale conversion of these lands to non-agricultural uses — even for well-intentioned purposes — undermines the original purpose of PPAs. By reducing the allowable acreage from 5 percent to 2 percent, the bill restores proportionality between renewable energy siting and farmland protection.

Farmland preservation is not solely about acreage totals. The fragmentation of farmland — breaking large, contiguous agricultural landscapes into smaller, disconnected pieces — can be just as damaging as outright loss.

ESLC also supports the bill's requirement that the Maryland Department of the Environment study the environmental impacts associated with the end-of-life disposal of solar photovoltaic systems.

As solar infrastructure expands rapidly, it is prudent to evaluate long-term waste streams and environmental impacts now, rather than after large-scale deployment has already occurred. This study will help inform future policy decisions and ensure that renewable energy solutions remain environmentally responsible throughout their full lifecycle.

The State has intentionally designated Priority Preservation Areas as the places where farming should remain viable, resilient, and uninterrupted. This bill preserves flexibility for renewable energy growth while reaffirming that Maryland's best farmland is a finite, irreplaceable resource and we urge a favorable report.

Respectfully,

Carol Bean
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