



House Bill 532

*Protecting Natural Resources and Preserving Productive Farms – Commission on the
Development of a Blueprint for Solar Energy in Maryland*

MACo Position: **SUPPORT**
WITH AMENDMENTS

Date: March 6, 2019

To: Environment and Transportation
Committee

From: Leslie Knapp, Jr.

The Maryland Association of Counties (MACo) **SUPPORTS** HB 532 **WITH AMENDMENTS**. This bill seeks to address the challenging issue of solar project siting.

HB 532 would establish a Commission on the Development of a Blueprint for Solar Energy in Maryland. The Commission's purpose would be to identify areas where community or utility scale solar projects should be encouraged and areas where such projects should be restricted or discouraged.

Broadly, MACo supports the goals of the bill. MACo and many counties have been engaged in a similar exercise over the last several years to ensure that large solar facilities are properly sited through local zoning so that the facilities are viable but important local priorities, such as prime agricultural lands, are protected. Ensuring local zoning has a role in the siting of solar facilities was previously a MACo Legislative Initiative and led to the passage of HB 1350 of 2017.

MACo's position on solar largely mirrors that of the Commission's. MACo believes that rooftop solar should be the priority, then moving to brownfields and grayfields (such as parking lots or warehouse rooftops). Finally, where large projects must go onto open space, it should be in areas zoned by the counties, with adequate protections for prime soils, sensitive environmental areas, and areas of cultural or historical importance.

MACo does caution against a one-size-fits-all approach, however, as different counties have zoned for solar in ways that work best for their residents. Some counties have identified specific parcels of land for solar development while others have established floating zones or special exceptions.

MACo offers four amendments to HB 532:

1. Add an additional MACo representative, specifying one representative must be from an urban county and one representative must be from a rural county.

2. Allow MACo to select its representatives instead of going through the appointment process (similar to what the Maryland Farm Bureau has in the bill).
3. In the bill section discussing areas where solar development should be encouraged, add “6. lands zoned for solar development by a local government.”
4. In the bill section discussing areas where solar development should be discouraged, add “6. lands not zoned for solar development by a local government.”

In conclusion, MACo supports the goals of HB 532 so long as local zoning is acknowledged in the Commission’s recommendations and a “one-size-fits-all” top-down mandate is avoided. Accordingly, MACo requests the Committee gives HB 532 a report of **FAVORABLE WITH AMENDMENTS**.