



May 18, 2026

Re: CB31-2026

Members of the Howard County Council:

My name is Carl Latkin. I'm here tonight representing the Howard County Sierra Club in support of CB31-2026, the S.M.A.R.T. Siting Act—a temporary moratorium and task force on large data centers in Howard County.

CB31 does not permanently ban data centers; it simply gives Howard County time to develop the rules we need before we're locked into decisions that will affect our community's infrastructure, with environmental and budget consequences for decades.

Howard County is not alone in recognizing the need for careful planning of data centers. Baltimore, Carroll, Prince George's, Frederick County, and Baltimore City have similarly implemented or considered pauses or limitations on data center development, and the Montgomery County Council is scheduled to vote on a two-year pause.

Data centers consume a massive amount of electricity. The very substantial amount of electricity consumed by data centers could offset most or all of the greenhouse gas savings from our energy efficiency programs and negate the greenhouse gas reductions stemming from renewable energy development.

They also require substantial water for cooling, depending on the design. And they frequently install on-site diesel backup generators, which can emit particulate matter and nitrogen oxides—pollutants that worsen lung disease and contribute to ozone formation.

Howard County should not be setting itself up for a future where residents face higher levels of pollution. Data centers are often marketed as major job creators, but operational staffing can be surprisingly small, with only a few dozen jobs.

Elected officials and ratepayers deserve a transparent accounting of the true public costs—electric infrastructure expansion, transmission lines, substations, water and sewer, roads, and also noise, visual, and ecosystem impacts—as part of an approval process. CB31 is designed to force full-cost accounting before approvals resume.

I want to emphasize that this is also an equity issue. Policy should ensure that the health of our communities is not adversely impacted, and that overburdened communities are not bearing the brunt of high utility costs. Specific attention should be paid to differential impacts on overburdened and underserved communities.

Finally, it is important to note that the major AI companies—Google, OpenAI, Meta, and others—have the resources to run data centers on renewable sources of energy and use water resources efficiently. However, if jurisdictions do not require these companies to be good stewards of our environment, their actions will exacerbate air pollution, accelerate climate change, and reduce freshwater sources.

CB31 gives Howard County time to develop objective siting and performance standards, rather than addressing harm only after communities experience it. Please support CB31-2026.

Thank you for your time and service to our community.



Carl Latkin, Executive Committee  
Howard County Sierra Club



Good evening, Chair Jones, Vice-Chair Rigby and Councilmembers. I'm Doug Siglin. I live in western Howard County. I'm retired after working on national and regional environmental policy in DC and Annapolis for four decades. About five months ago, the director of the Chesapeake Climate Action Network asked me to volunteer to help with the environmental implications of data centers in Maryland. A great thing about being retired in this information age is that you can go very, very deep if you want to. I've learned an enormous amount about the costs and environmental impacts of data center energy and water use and have been actively working with the Montgomery County Council to help them deal with these issues.

Last week Gallup released its first-ever nonpartisan poll on data centers. A stunning 71% of people surveyed said they don't want data centers in their neighborhood, significantly more than say they don't want a nuclear plant. Across the country people – and not just Democrats – are showing up yelling at elected officials in public meetings. In Frederick County, more than 21,000 people signed a petition for a referendum to overturn the County Council's approval of a data center overlay zone.

What's driving the extraordinary fear? People across the political spectrum believe, not unreasonably, that obscenely rich companies with campaign contributions and battalions of lobbyists are colluding with politicians to ram this scary technology down our throats, and in the process, socializing their costs so that we all pay for it. But thoughtful people are also reacting to the fact that so far, hyperscale data centers are simply lousy neighbors—they raise our electric bills; they make climate change worse; they suck up and evaporate precious water; they pollute the air and cause respiratory disease. But it doesn't have to be that way. The technology exists to build data centers—even very big ones—right. But the past several years show that data centers simply won't be built right unless elected officials require it by law. Notwithstanding huge profits, most companies won't spend a dollar more to be good citizens than they are required to. I'm pretty sure that this is not news to you.

So here are my thoughts on CB31. First, thanks to Vice-Chair Rigby for starting the conversation in our county. Second, yes, by all means put a moratorium on new large data centers until you get rules in place, either through a zoning text amendment or the Comprehensive Rezoning process.

But third, and critically, if the task force called for in CB31 is going to be really useful, you need to be much more direct about exactly what you want the product to be. Think ahead to how you can require Howard County data centers to be good citizens, and specifically what public

harms data center zoning text must avoid. You don't want data centers to make a mockery of the county's climate goals. You don't want them to pollute the air with diesel emissions and compromise residents' health. You don't want them to suck up and evaporate Patuxent River or public water during a drought like we are in now. You don't want them to unreasonably drive up electric bills, or bombard residents with continuous noise, or lower property values.

So if you choose to set up a task force, direct it to give you real answers to those real issues.

The recently-considered Montgomery County task force bill provides an example. A salient issue in Montgomery is achievement of the greenhouse gas reduction goals that the Council adopted in 2017. Everybody recognizes that if large data centers use energy direct from the regional power grid, or worse yet, from behind the meter gas turbines, they will overwhelm those goals. So the Montgomery task force bill is very directive:

“The task force must analyze how proposed and projected new data center development in the County will affect the County's adopted climate goals and greenhouse-gas reduction targets and must include, at minimum:

- (A) a quantitative assessment of projected direct and indirect greenhouse-gas emissions associated with new data center development over 5- and 10-year horizons, including from operational energy demand and the use of backup generators;
- (B) an evaluation of how projected data center electricity demand will interact with the regional electric grid mix and County-level emissions, and how demand will affect the County's residential ratepayers;
- (C) an assessment of how data center development would advance or hinder achievement of the County's Climate Action Plan and any binding emissions reduction commitments;
- (D) recommended policy, regulatory, zoning, and incentive measures designed to ensure data center growth is consistent with the County's climate goals, including consideration of renewable energy procurement or onsite generation requirements, and energy-use reporting and verification;
- (E) identification of data gaps, modeling assumptions, and recommendations for ongoing County monitoring and reporting requirements.”

Howard County and the state of Maryland both have climate goals similar to Montgomery's, and I would urge that CB31 be amended to include this language as well.

From an environmental point of view, you should also include language to get clear, strong language recommendations to minimize water use and require non-polluting backup power. Closed-loop cooling systems are the state of the art, but they're not the default because they cost more. Primary battery backup systems that avoid polluting diesel generators during short power outages are also the state of the art, but they add capital cost and require more space. But incremental costs to the industry shouldn't be your deciding factor; your interest should be prohibiting the socialization of their costs to Howard County residents.

So broadly, my point is this: if you want the task force to be useful, don't just tell it to "consider best practices" as it does now, but rather amend the statute to tell it to give you strong recommendations that you can consider directly for zoning changes. And then, of course, make sure that the right people are on the task force to produce what you want—that it's not dominated by industry types committed to getting their data centers built as soon as possible by passing on costs to the public.

Just two other short thoughts before I close. First, you do have broad authority under Maryland law to set performance standards in a zoning text, including for energy and water use. Don't fall for the argument that those issues are outside your scope. Second, a task force may not be the best way to get the information you need. Notwithstanding all the detailed language in the Montgomery task force bill, the Council ultimately rejected it. The view prevailed among Councilmembers that the current public process of developing the zoning text amendment itself is sufficient for getting the information that the Council needs, and there was no need for redundancy. You might want to consider that, too.

Incidentally, there is a consensus amendment that will be added to Montgomery's pending zoning text change stating that data centers must be powered by 100% carbon free energy 24/7 starting from day one, and there will likely be requirements for closed-loop cooling, primary battery backup, noise restrictions, and other important citizen safeguards.

Thank you for the chance to share some of what I've learned. I look forward to collaborating with you as you work to make sure that Howard County data centers are good neighbors.



# HCCA

**Howard County Citizens Association**

*Since 1961...*

*The Voice Of The People of Howard County*

Date: 18 May 2026

Subject: HCCA Testimony Regarding CB31-2026

Dear Howard County Council,

I am Stu Kohn from Scaggsville testifying for the Howard County Citizens Association, HCCA as its President. We want to congratulate Council member Christina Rigby on taking the initiative in investigating the Data Centers. This is definitely a step in the right direction. Victor Hugo, stated, "Initiative is doing the right thing without being told." Ms. Rigby, this was you! Thank you.

However, before we go further there are some questions and suggestions we have in an attempt to make this Bill more meaningful.

Please refer to Council-member Rigby's News Release the second paragraph states, "The moratorium will sunset once the County adopts updated zoning regulations or completes the next comprehensive zoning process." The problem is in both these cases they are woefully out of date, because the Administration has failed to take the necessary action during their tenure. So, the question is when can anyone depend on a completion date? We are very skeptical especially since there was an excellent strategic plan in 2016 performed by Clarion regarding the Development Regulations Assessment. This can be found on the County Website especially when you see over 700 comments from the public. It had and still does have a lot of merit! The Comprehensive Zoning Process is required to be completed every 10 years. It is now nearly 3 years out of date. Why? This is inexcusable!

Please refer to the Bill, page 1, line 29 — it states a "temporary moratorium on new data center development." We strongly suggest the word "temporary be defined on page 4 in Section C.

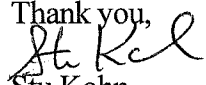
Refer to page 2, line 23 — how long do you envision will be the "Effective Period?" Why in Section 6.E when referring to page 4, lines 16 thru 18 are the following agencies declared exempt; the Public School System, the Community College and the Library?

Refer to page 3, line 19 — please tell us how the Task Force will be chosen, what qualifications will be required of its members, and how many will be on the Task Force?

Refer to page 4, lines 25 thru 27 — it states, "Should any part of this Act be declared unconstitutional or invalid by a court of competent jurisdiction, such decision shall not affect the validity of the remaining parts of this Act." Why do you think this Act might be considered unconstitutional? Furthermore, how will the remaining parts of the Act be enforceable if found to be declared unconstitutional.

We only hope that this Bill once amended that attention to detail will turn out to indeed be a very SMART move to protect the welfare and safety of all Howard County residents. In this case SMART should stand for Sensible-Manageable-Accountable-Reliable-Transition.

Council member Rigby, your initiative is very commendable and should be congratulated, but only if positive actions are taken to ensure the future of us all is fully protected.

Thank you,  
  
Stu Kohn  
HCCA President

## cb31 opposition

Good evening. My name is Matthew Frieswyk. I'm a Howard County resident, a software engineer, and someone who hopes to build a small business here one day.

I'm here in opposition to CB31-2026 as drafted.

I love living in Howard County. My family is building our life here, and I hope to raise my children here — in a county that is thoughtful and careful, and also optimistic about the future.

I understand why this bill was introduced. The County's current zoning was not written for the data centers being built today. Power, water, cooling, generators, noise, traffic, long-term site impacts — these questions deserve serious study.

And because this issue matters, the County should move faster and more carefully — not impose a broad moratorium that can last far longer than necessary.

That's why I urge the Council to amend CB31 into a fast study-and-standards bill. Keep the task force. Keep the public process. Remove the moratorium. Require interim findings within 90 days and final recommendations within 180.

Here's the good news: we don't have to start from scratch. Just across the river, Loudoun County has spent more than a decade learning how to zone and regulate data centers at scale — the successes and the cautionary tales. A serious 180-day study can draw directly from what they've already figured out.

There's a real difference between saying "our rules need to catch up" and "let's freeze an entire category of infrastructure while we figure it out."

Dr. Ball recently spoke to the Chamber of Commerce about Howard County's business future — backing businesses, preparing for emerging industries, building a community where the next generation can believe their future is here at home. That message resonated with me.

CB31, though, sends a different message. It tells entrepreneurs and investors that if a new technology becomes controversial, Howard County may pause first and write the rules later. That creates uncertainty — and uncertainty matters when someone is deciding whether to start a business, expand one, or invest here.

I'd also ask us to remember what a data center actually is. It's not an abstraction. It's the building behind the things our families use every day. When your kids log into HCPSS Canvas, that's a data center. When you check your bank account, refill a prescription, or video-call your parents — that's a

data center. They're as essential to modern life as the power grid or the water system. The question isn't whether we want them. We already depend on them. The real question is whether we have a voice in how they're built — and whether the economic benefits accrue here, or somewhere else.

Howard County shouldn't push that future away. We should shape it. Study the impacts. Write strong standards. Regulate measurable impacts — don't freeze categories of technology.

Please amend CB31. Dr. Ball has asked us to meet the moment. A moratorium doesn't meet the moment — it postpones it. Let's meet it with smart rules, clear standards, and the confidence that Howard County can lead.

Thank you.