

S.M.A.R.T. Siting Act

From Laurie S. Coltri <lscoltri@verizon.net>
Date Mon 5/4/2026 2:16 PM
To CouncilMail <CouncilMail@howardcountymd.gov>

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I'm strongly in favor of CB31-2026, the S.M.A.R.T. Siting Act, introduced by Councilwoman Christiana Rigby.

As a long time Howard County resident, I'm very concerned about the high energy uses of these data centers, impacting our climate and the costs of energy in the county, as well as direct impact on open space and liveability. I'm also worried about the possible uses of data centers in an era when digital information is potentially being used as a weapon by oligarchs and fascists to destroy our democracy and oppress our immigrant and other marginalized populations.

Thank you for your consideration of my concerns,

Laurie Coltri, Thunder Hill, 21045-1902

Bill No. 31-2026

From Marlene Durholz <mdurholz@gmail.com>

Date Fri 5/15/2026 11:38 AM

To CouncilMail <CouncilMail@howardcountymd.gov>

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Hello,

I am writing in support of Council Bill 31-2026 S.M.A.R.T (Strategic Moratorium for Assessing Responsible Technology) Siting Act and a task force to study the impact of data centers and best practices for data center development. I agree there should be removal of the data center tax credit now. Perhaps there should be discussion of allowing smaller data centers ranging from 5,000 to 10,000 square feet and with power demands less than 5 megawatts during the study of data center potential impact. Smaller data centers already exist in Howard County. The moratorium in Baltimore City is for data centers using less than 10 megawatts but there was discussion this limit was too high. Limiting the size of data centers rather than stopping all growth until recommendations are passed into law or 18 months after the effective date of the S.M.A.R.T. Siting Act appears to be a better compromise.

Marlene Durholz
6329 Hanover Crossing Way
Hanover, MD 21076
Howard County Resident

CB 31-2026 - Data Centers - NAIOP Comment Letter Attached.

From Tom Ballentine <tom.ballentine@naiop-md.org>

Date Fri 5/15/2026 12:26 PM

To CouncilMail <CouncilMail@howardcountymd.gov>

 1 attachment (369 KB)

CB 31 - Data Center Moratorium and Task Force -NAIOP Testimony Letter - 5-15-26.pdf;

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Good afternoon Council Chair Jones and Council members –

On behalf of NAIOP's commercial real estate members I am writing to forward the attached comments and recommendations on CB 31-2026.

Please feel free to reach out directly if you would like to discuss in more detail.

Thank you for considering NAIOP's point of view.

All the best

tb

Tom Ballentine

Vice President for Policy and Government Relations

NAIOP Maryland Chapters – *The Association for Commercial Real Estate*

Phone: 410.977.2053

Email: tom.ballentine@naiop-md.org

U.S. Mail: P.O. Box 16280 Baltimore, Maryland 21210



The Maryland Chapters of NAIOP represent more than 700 companies involved in commercial, industrial and mixed use real estate. Established in 1967 as the National Association of Industrial and Office Properties, today NAIOP is the nation's leading advocate for companies involved in commercial construction, land development, brokerage, property management, finance, architecture, engineering and law. For more information, please visit www.naiopmd.org



Mary 15, 2026

The Honorable, Opal Jones, Chair
Howard County Council
3430 Court House Drive
Ellicott City, MD 21043

Support w Amendments - CB 31-2026 - Data Center Moratorium and Task Force

Dear Chair Jones and Council Members:

The NAIOP Maryland Chapters represent approximately seven hundred companies involved in all aspects of commercial, industrial, and mixed-use real estate, including some of the largest property owners in Howard County. On behalf of our member companies, I am writing to offer comments and recommend amendments to CB 31-2026 which would establish a moratorium on data center development and appoint a task force to study their future in Howard County.

Position Overview

We appreciate the County's interest in responding to emerging land uses and the desire for well-designed development. In the case of data centers, NAIOP believes this can be accomplished without the reputational damage and unnecessarily disruption to economic development that would result from an extended 12–18-month development moratorium. Furthermore, we believe the bill should explicitly recognize the long-term importance of data centers to the County's innovation economy and broaden the task force to include participation from data center developers, owners, and operators.

NAIOP's position is based, in part, on the following rationale:

- **The Definition of Data Center is Too Broad** – The definition of “data center” in the bill makes no distinction between different sizes and types of data centers. With no attributes to qualify a data center, the definition would apply to everything from hyperscale centers that have the largest physical footprints and power demands to banks of servers and storage systems that can be found in many office buildings.
 - **Recommendation:** Amend the bill to define data centers consistent with how state law now defines large electric load facilities.
- **Every Effort Should be Made to Avoid the Reputational Damage of a Moratorium** – A blanket data center moratorium sends a negative market signal that may not be easily reversed at the end of the moratorium. This approach also blocks even well-sited, minimal impact data center projects. Case by case regulation is a better approach. The county should make every effort to address design and operational concerns directly with any project applicants as an alternative to a development moratorium.

- **Recommendation:** Remove the moratorium language from the bill but proceed with a task force to study the design and operational considerations.
- **Data Centers Are Critical to the Innovation Economy** – The bill should explicitly acknowledge that data centers are essential to the county’s innovation economy. This does not weaken the language related to design and operating standards but is an important statement that the council intends to adopt a balanced approach to regulating data centers.
 - **Recommendation:** On page 2 after line 4, the bill should be amended to insert, *WHEREAS, Data centers are foundational to the tech economy and long-term competitiveness providing secure, resilient compute capacity that powers cloud services, artificial intelligence, financial transactions, healthcare systems, and everyday online activity, while also anchoring high-wage jobs, attracting related investment, and strengthening regional innovation ecosystems—making it essential that local policy modernize standards and infrastructure planning in a way that enables responsible growth rather than shifting this critical economic engine to competing jurisdictions; and*”
- **Task Force Participation from Developers, Owners and Operators is Essential** – As introduced, the bill specifies a Task Force composed only of government representatives. Given the rapidly changing nature of the data center landscape, we believe it is essential that the Task Force includes industry representation.
 - **Recommendation:** The Task Force membership should be amended to include developers, owners, and/or operators of data centers.

Thank you for considering NAIOP’s point of view.

Sincerely,



Tom Ballentine, Vice President for Policy

NAIOP – Maryland Chapters, *The Association for Commercial Real Estate*

cc: Howard County Council Members
NAIOP Howard County Leadership Group

Support for CB31-2026

From KC CARES <kcvillagecares@gmail.com>

Date Sat 5/16/2026 7:31 AM

To CouncilMail <CouncilMail@howardcountymd.gov>

Cc Rigby, Christiana <crigby@howardcountymd.gov>; Goldscher, Paige <pgoldscher@howardcountymd.gov>

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May 14, 2026

Howard County Council
George Howard Building
3430 Court House Drive
Ellicott City, MD 21043

Re: Support for CB31-2026

Dear Chairperson and Members of the Howard County Council:

On behalf of the leadership team of KC CARES, the village environmental group for Kings Contrivance village in Columbia, I am writing in strong support of CB31-2026 and its proposal to temporarily pause approval of new data center developments while Howard County undertakes a comprehensive review of the impacts associated with this rapidly expanding industry.

KC CARES was founded in 2020, and we have grown to include a membership of over a thousand-person readership of our weekly environmental newsletter, Columbia CARES. We also engage with Kings Contrivance residents through several annual native plant giveaways, Weed Warrior volunteer opportunities, and educational events, including a well-attended recent Columbia-wide Environmental Townhall.

Across the country, communities are struggling to keep pace with the scale and intensity of modern data center development. Local governments that once viewed these facilities as relatively low-impact commercial uses are now confronting serious questions involving industrial-scale electricity demand, intensive water consumption, persistent mechanical noise, diesel backup generation, land-use compatibility, and long-term strain on public infrastructure. Many jurisdictions are now revisiting their regulations only after residents have experienced significant negative impacts firsthand.

Howard County has the opportunity to take a more responsible and proactive approach.

CB31-2026 creates the time and space necessary for meaningful public engagement and informed decision-making before additional large-scale projects move forward. Residents deserve a transparent process that allows communities, technical experts, environmental professionals, and public health

stakeholders to fully evaluate how future data center development could affect nearby neighborhoods and natural resources.

We strongly support the legislation's emphasis on studying environmental and community impacts, particularly in the areas of water use, noise, and air pollution.

Large data centers can consume enormous quantities of water for cooling operations, raising legitimate concerns about long-term sustainability, watershed impacts, and competition for finite public water resources. At a time when many regions are already facing increasing climate pressures and water-management challenges, local governments must carefully evaluate whether existing infrastructure can support these demands responsibly.

Noise impacts have also emerged as a major concern in communities located near data center campuses. Residents in other jurisdictions have reported continuous low-frequency humming and mechanical noise generated by cooling systems and backup equipment operating around the clock. Without strong siting requirements, setbacks, and enforceable mitigation standards, these facilities can significantly affect quality of life for nearby neighborhoods.

In addition, backup diesel generators commonly used at data centers can contribute to localized air pollution and raise public health concerns, particularly when facilities are concentrated within a single area. Howard County should carefully examine cumulative environmental impacts before allowing widespread expansion under regulations that were not designed with this industry in mind.

Importantly, CB31-2026 does not prevent future data center development. Rather, it ensures that any future growth occurs under modern policies informed by science, public input, environmental review, and careful long-term planning. A temporary pause is a prudent step that allows the County to develop clear standards that protect residents, infrastructure, and ecological resources while providing certainty for future development decisions.

We respectfully urge the County Council to pass CB31-2026 and demonstrate Howard County's commitment to thoughtful planning, environmental stewardship, and meaningful community engagement.

Sincerely,

Kate Reilly
Chair
KC CARES

Re: Testimony Sign-up

From Carl Latkin <clatkin2000@gmail.com>
Date Sun 5/17/2026 2:57 PM
To CouncilMail <CouncilMail@howardcountymd.gov>

 1 attachment (107 KB)

CB31_Testimony_5.18.26_Latkin_Sierra_Club.pdf;

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Dear Howard County Council,
Please find a copy of my testimony attached for Monday.
Thank you,
Carl

On Thu, May 14, 2026 at 9:28 AM Carl Latkin <clatkin2000@gmail.com> wrote:
| Here's the form.
| Best regards,
| Carl



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.

Elected officials and ratepayers are entitled to a transparent understanding of the true costs borne by the public for data center development. An analysis of the expected costs of infrastructure expansion necessary to service data center demand—for energy, water, transmission lines, sewer, new roads, energy substations, and also noise, visual, and ecosystem impacts—must be conducted as part of the approval process.

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.

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Carl Latkin".

Carl Latkin, Executive Committee
Howard County Sierra Club

CB31-2026

From Leigh Roberts <lar@brventures.com>
Date Sun 5/17/2026 8:31 PM
To CouncilMail <CouncilMail@howardcountymd.gov>

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Hello,

I would like to submit my support for CB31-2026, which would temporarily pause approvals for new data center development proposals in Howard County. I believe that we need to understand the following issues BEFORE building data centers:

- Appropriate siting and zoning standards for data centers
- Water and energy consumption impacts
- Noise mitigation and buffering requirements
- Public health, safety, and environmental considerations
- Best practices from other jurisdictions
- Long-term community and infrastructure impacts

I would like to ensure that Howard County takes a thoughtful and informed approach to this rapidly evolving industry before additional large-scale projects move forward.

Thank you,
Leigh Roberts, Columbia, MD

CB31-2026

From Ruth Frost <ruthsfrost@gmail.com>

Date Sun 5/17/2026 9:24 AM

To CouncilMail <CouncilMail@howardcountymd.gov>

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Hi Howard County Council,

Please keep data centers out of Howard County.

- * They have a significant, negative environmental footprint.
- * They support the AI tools and services which have been blamed for the massive layoffs lately.

The proliferation of data centers in the US only supports allowing the rich to get richer, and everyone else suffers.

I love the idea of using AI to help society as a whole:

- * Negotiating and maintaining peace
- * Repairing the environment (air, water, land, invasive plants, & endangered animals)
- * Helping disadvantaged people (leveling the playing field)
- * Improving health & reducing cost of healthcare for everyone
- * Learning more about our universe

To make that happen, we need to reserve AI for those goals and nothing else. In that context, we don't need data centers in every county.


Thanks,
Ruth Simpson Frost
240 499 5702

8064 Prelude Lane
Jessup MD, 20794

<https://www.linkedin.com/in/ruthfrost>

Maryland Tech Council Testimony - CB31-2026, S.M.A.R.T. Siting Act

From Andrew Zirkle <Andrew@mdtechcouncil.com>
Date Mon 5/18/2026 5:30 PM
To CouncilMail <CouncilMail@howardcountymd.gov>
Cc Kelly Schulz <Kelly@mdtechcouncil.com>

 1 attachment (538 KB)
MTC_Testimony_SMART_Act.pdf;

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Good afternoon,

Please see the attached written testimony from the Maryland Tech Council regarding CB31-2026, the SMART Siting Act. If you need any additional information, please let me know.

Best,

Andrew Zirkle



Andrew Zirkle
Internal Government Affairs Specialist
E: andrew@mdtechcouncil.com | **P:** 240-282-1551





May 18th, 2026

Howard County Council
George Howard Building
3430 Court House Drive
Ellicott City, MD 21043

Re: CB31-2026, S.M.A.R.T. Siting Act – Maryland Tech Council Testimony

Dear Chair Jones and Members of the Council,

On behalf of the Maryland Tech Council (MTC), I respectfully submit testimony in opposition to CB31-2026. MTC represents more than 800 technology and life sciences companies across Maryland, including many that maintain operations, employ residents, or pursue capital investment in Howard County. We share the Council's interest in ensuring that new land uses are sited responsibly, but we believe the moratorium proposed in CB31-2026 is the wrong instrument for that goal and would impose substantial and avoidable costs on Howard County residents.

Maryland currently ranks 40th in the country in five-year job growth and is staring down a projected \$3 billion structural budget deficit by Fiscal Year 2030. Counties across the country are competing for a wave of technology infrastructure investment that the U.S. industry has signaled will exceed \$500 billion by the end of the decade. Howard County's decision is not whether this investment will occur, but whether it will occur within its borders or in a neighboring jurisdiction.

The economic profile of the use is well-documented. A 2025 analysis by Sage Policy Group, commissioned by MTC, found that a single typical 800,000-square-foot data center supports approximately 5,000 direct and indirect jobs and \$775 million in economic activity during construction, generates roughly \$18 million in tax revenue during the construction phase, and once operational supports nearly 500 permanent jobs and approximately \$14 million in annual state tax revenue. Every 100 construction jobs support an additional 39 jobs across restaurants, healthcare, insurance, real estate, and other Howard County industries. Every million square feet of operational space generates more than \$16 million in state revenue annually, and data centers place minimal demand on the public services that drive local government spending. For a county facing the same fiscal and workforce pressures the state confronts, foreclosing this base of high-wage construction work, permanent employment, and stable commercial tax base is an opportunity cost that warrants careful deliberation.

CB31-2026 acknowledges that its purpose is to define "data center" in the Zoning Regulations and develop recommendations on siting, screening, water and energy consumption, noise, and related standards. Those are reasonable policy goals, however, they can be answered without halting all private applications for up to 18 months. The task force contemplated in Section 5 can be convened immediately. The Department of Planning and Zoning can continue to accept and review applications submitted during the study period through the existing development review process, withholding final approval until the task force completes its work and the Council acts on targeted zoning text amendments. Applications that meet the resulting criteria can then proceed to approval. This sequencing preserves the County's ability to shape outcomes and apply whatever standards it ultimately adopts to every project, while avoiding the avoidable cost of telling applicants the County is unavailable in the interim.

A blanket moratorium signals something different. It tells capital markets, prospective employers, and the construction trades that Howard County is closed to a category of investment while it deliberates, with the risk that the pause could extend through comprehensive rezoning. Projects that might have come to Howard County will be sited elsewhere, and the associated jobs, tax revenue, and infrastructure investment will follow them. That redirection is not theoretical. It is already underway in other jurisdictions across the region.

Howard County also need not begin this analysis from a blank slate. Several Maryland jurisdictions have already completed substantial work the County can draw upon directly. Prince George's County convened a data center



MARYLAND TECH COUNCIL

ADVANCING LIFE SCIENCES AND TECHNOLOGY

task force that produced an extensive set of recommendations on siting, zoning process, and environmental protection. Frederick and Montgomery counties have advanced specific siting guardrails addressing setbacks, screening, noise, and the appropriate zoning districts for these facilities. We encourage the Council and the proposed task force to evaluate the outcomes and lessons of these jurisdictions, which can meaningfully shorten the time Howard County needs to develop sound standards of its own.

MTC respectfully urges the Council to reject the moratorium framework in CB31-2026 and instead pursue the substantive policy work the bill contemplates through a parallel track that does not pause the development review process. Specifically, we would support:

1. Standing up the proposed task force immediately, with industry, labor, environmental, and community stakeholder representation;
2. Allowing the Department of Planning and Zoning to review applications submitted during the study period through the existing development review process while withholding final approval until the study is completed;
3. Act on targeted zoning text amendments once the task force completes its work and allow for project applications that meet the developed criteria to be approved.

Should the Council nonetheless determine that a moratorium is necessary, we respectfully urge two modifications to limit its harm. First, the effective period should be substantially shorter than the 18 months currently contemplated. As drafted, CB31-2026 would impose the longest data center moratorium of any jurisdiction in Maryland. Other jurisdictions that have pursued similar policies in Maryland have all determined that moratoriums of between 6-12 months were appropriate to study and develop a final zoning text amendment. Second, consistent with the bill's existing exemption for County government, school system, and library facilities in Section 6.E, the exemption should be expanded to include data centers that would serve an end user with a public health or national security purpose. Facilities supporting hospital systems, emergency services, or federal national security missions advance public interests that should not be delayed by a moratorium directed at non-critical commercial development.

MTC welcomes the opportunity to participate constructively in the task force process and to share the economic, fiscal, and operational research we have developed. Thank you for your consideration.

Respectfully,

Kelly M. Schulz
Chief Executive Officer

HCAR Letter of Support for CB31-2026

From Elizabeth Billquist <elizabeth@summitgovernmentaffairs.com>

Date Mon 5/18/2026 2:34 PM

To CouncilMail <CouncilMail@howardcountymd.gov>

 1 attachment (191 KB)

CB31-2026 _ Council Letter from HCAR.pdf;

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Hello Howard County Council,

On behalf of our client, the Howard County Association of REALTORS, please ensure each member of the county council receives a copy of this letter of support for **CB31-2026**. We also request that it be entered into the public record as part of this evening's testimony. Thank you.

Elizabeth Billquist

Government Affairs Manager

[Summit Government Affairs](http://www.summitgovernmentaffairs.com)

Direct: (815) 341-2295



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Main 410-715-1437
Fax 410-715-1489
Web www.hcar.org

Howard County Association of REALTORS®

To: Council Chair Jones and Honorable Members of the County Council

Date: May 18, 2026

RE: CB31-2026 - S.M.A.R.T. Siting Act.

Good Morning Chair Jones and Members of the Howard County Council,

On behalf of the Howard County Association of REALTORS®, we support CB31-2026 - S.M.A.R.T. (Strategic Moratorium for Assessing Responsible Technology) Siting Act. CB31-2026 establishes a necessary temporary moratorium on new data center approvals, including prohibiting the Department of Planning and Zoning from accepting plan submissions or any actions to permit or regulate them by the Council during the study period.

We support CB31-2026 because this proposed moratorium will give the County the necessary time to implement strong policies that will protect overall land-use. This bill reflects a thoughtful and responsible approach to protecting land-use and guiding future development in Howard County. This proposed moratorium also gives the opportunity for additional land to be used for affordable housing, a need that is prevalent in Howard County.

We appreciate that the County understands the significant impact these facilities have on public infrastructure and the communities. Data centers use large amounts of electricity, water, and land, which will put a strain on the local economy and infrastructure. Howard County cannot afford to have such a strain. We applaud the County for proposing to study these potential impacts further and how to negate these impacts, prior to new data center developments in the County.

REALTORS® are ready to help the County on this issue, including recommending best practices for these data centers. We look forward to participating with you on this item in the future.

We ask that the council votes yes on CB31-2026.

Respectfully,

Tony Zowd

Chair, HCAR Legislative Committee

Howard County Association of REALTORS®

Council Bill 31-2026

From Gail Holm <gailholm@gmail.com>

Date Mon 5/18/2026 5:10 PM

To CouncilMail <CouncilMail@howardcountymd.gov>

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Dear Council Members,

I urge you to pass Council Bill 31-2026, The Strategic Moratorium for Assessing Responsible Technology.

It is critical that we understand how data centers might affect our county's resources and quality of life. Issues need to be identified and studied so recommendations can be put in place to guide data center development, making sure that it is in line with respect for our resources and our citizens.

Please pass Council Bill 31-2026.

Sincerely,

Gail P. Holm

10081 Fair Beauty

Columbia, MD 21046

--

Gail P. Holm
(she, her)

Council Bill 31-2026

From Kathy Osborne <kathyosborne1@gmail.com>

Date Mon 5/18/2026 10:57 AM

To CouncilMail <CouncilMail@howardcountymd.gov>

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Dear council,

I support Council Bill 31-2026 and ask that it be approved. We need to be responsible about the impacts of data centers in our community before moving forward.

Thank you

Kathy Osborne

CB31-2026 Testimony

From Liz Feighner <liz.feighner@gmail.com>

Date Mon 5/18/2026 1:06 PM

To CouncilMail <CouncilMail@howardcountymd.gov>

Cc Rigby, Christiana <crigby@howardcountymd.gov>; Walsh, Elizabeth <ewalsh@howardcountymd.gov>; Jones, Opel <ojones@howardcountymd.gov>; Jung, Debra <djung@howardcountymd.gov>; Yungmann, David <dyungmann@howardcountymd.gov>

 1 attachment (183 KB)

CB-31-2026-Testimony-Feighner.pdf;

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Dear Councilmembers,

Please accept the attached testimony for CB31-2026.

Regards,

Liz Feighner

“Winning Slowly Is the Same as Losing” ~ Bill McKibben

*“We do not inherit the Earth from our Ancestors; we borrow it from our children” ~
Native American Proverb*

Testimony: CB31-2026 - Strategic Moratorium for Assessing Responsible Technology (SMART) Siting Act

Hearing Date: May 18, 2026

Bill Sponsor: Councilmember Rigby

Submitting: Liz Feighner, D3

Position: Favorable

I'm Liz Feighner, a 34-year resident of Laurel, District 3, and a member of HoCo Climate Action. I'm testifying as a concerned citizen and activist about the climate emergency.

Howard County released its Climate Action Plan in 2023, setting goals to reduce greenhouse gas emissions by 60% by 2030 and to achieve net zero by 2045. To date, we have achieved a 26% reduction in our community-wide greenhouse gas emissions, with the annual rate of these reductions increasing from 2.7% to 3.7%.

AI data centers, however, will put these county climate goals at serious risk. I wholeheartedly support [CB31-2026](#), which will pause data-center development in Howard County until we can determine the guardrails needed to protect the residents of Howard County from these energy- and resource-hogging facilities.

I just finished reading *The Lost Trees of Willow Avenue* by author and CCAN founder Mike Tidwell. He relays a Boy Scout lesson he taught as a troop leader: When you are lost or unsure, Stop! Take a pause and Think before moving forward. That is a lesson that we urgently need to follow today, and I thank Councilmember Rigby for introducing this legislation to take a pause and move forward judiciously.

The proliferation of AI data centers has already caused soaring electricity prices and put a strain on water resources and municipal infrastructure, all the while big tech is receiving generous tax exemptions and raking in billions. The state of Maryland gave counties the authority to exempt data centers from personal property taxes in order to attract them. Howard County took advantage in 2020 by giving data centers a sweetheart deal on property taxes. We are giving away needed revenue to big tech unnecessarily and we should repeal this tax exemption.

According to a [NYT article](#) from 2025, "tax breaks pale in importance to finding power, land and labor." Bo Williams, the executive responsible for Microsoft's data centers in North America said, "I can't think of a site selection or placement decision that was decided on a set of tax incentives." Howard County needs to repeal these tax breaks now and not wait for a task force study. Our county budget and residents' pocketbooks are already strained. Residents are struggling with basic living expenses and officials are cutting budgets while big tech is raking in billions.

The task force needs to study how allowing any data center in Howard County will affect our Climate Forward Action plan and require that data centers mitigate any harm to achieving our county's goals. The two data centers that I am aware of in Howard County (one built and the other under construction) use diesel generators that spew dangerous air pollutants such as nitrogen oxides, carbon monoxide, and particulate matter. Diesel exhaust is known to harm

health, with well-documented links to increased risk of lung cancer, cardiovascular disease, asthma, and premature mortality.

Not only do these diesel generators pose serious risks to our health, they pose serious risks to achieving our climate action plan. We cannot go backward on reducing our greenhouse gas emissions. We are losing our battle of limiting warming on Earth to 1.5 C, which is the limit for preventing the worst impacts of the climate crisis. As Bill McKibben has said: Winning slowly is the same as losing. We must stick to our goals for the sake of ourselves, our children and grandchildren.

Respectfully Submitted,

Liz Feighner



Testimony: CB31-2026

From Monica O'Connor <mdoconnor17@gmail.com>

Date Mon 5/18/2026 8:14 AM

To CouncilMail <CouncilMail@howardcountymd.gov>

 1 attachment (144 KB)

Testimony_CB31-2026 - Strategic Moratorium for Assessing Responsible Technology (SMART) Siting Act.pdf;

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Please accept written testimony in support of CB31-2026 on behalf of HocoClimate Action.

Thank you,

Monica O'Connor
585-208-4076



HoCoClimateAction.org
Howard County, Maryland

Testimony: CB31-2026 - Strategic Moratorium for Assessing Responsible Technology (SMART) Siting Act
Hearing Date: May 18, 2026
Bill Sponsor: Councilmember Rigby
Submitting: Monica O'Connor for Howard County Climate Action
Position: Favorable

Dear Council President and Council Members,

Thank you for this opportunity to testify in support of CB 31-2026, The Strategic Moratorium for Assessing Responsible Technology (SMART) Siting Act. [HoCo Climate Action](https://www.hococlimateaction.org) is a [350.org](https://www.350.org) local chapter and a grassroots organization representing approximately 1,400 subscribers. Our organization works with residents and ally organizations to promote a safe climate and clean energy future.

Data Center expansion is coming at breakneck speed. CB31-2026 seeks to slow down the process to ensure regulations and protections are put into place so that the benefits to Howard County residents of this fast growing industry outweighs negative environmental, health and social impacts.

Rapid data center growth is increasing demand for energy, driving more fossil fuel pollution, straining water resources and raising electricity prices. In order to safeguard Howard County residents from unwanted consequences we urge the County to place a moratorium on new data center development. This pause will give the County time to establish a data center definition, update outdated zoning regulations, study the potential impacts on the public health, safety, and welfare, and make recommendations on best practices for data center development. We urge a favorable report on CB31-2026 for the following reasons.

Zoning Regulations: Howard County last updated zoning regulation for data center facilities in 1993. Since that time the size and scope of data centers has expanded exponentially. Today one hyper-scale data center can use the power of 640,000 homes and be constructed in 3 years. Imagine the electrical demand of the City of Baltimore being added to the grid in three years. Right now, the estimated 3GW needed to power all the currently proposed data centers at the Alcoa site in Fredrick, for example, is nearly equal to the electricity used by all Maryland households.

Even small or moderate sized data centers raise questions about who is hurt and who is served. Should the new data centers be constructed in rural Howard County where water resources are

limited, or in urban areas where they will compete with needed affordable housing? Which neighborhoods will be asked to tolerate the noise pollution and air pollution (diesel is often the preferred backup) that data centers produce? How many good paying jobs will be created, what subsidies will be given, will there be a tax windfall? How do new data centers impact our climate goals?

Communities nationwide are protesting data center development - a situation we do not want in Howard County. A thoughtful, measured response that listens to the concerns of the community can help to hedge against such protests. Therefore, it is prudent for the Council to pause new construction and first consider the following:

Electricity rates/Affordability: Electricity costs in some data center-dense areas have surged by over 250% in just five years. In the PJM region — the world’s largest power market — capacity auction prices spiked 800% in 2024, in large part due to data center growth. That year, consumers across seven PJM states paid \$4.3 billion more in electricity costs to cover deployment of new transmission infrastructure to serve data centers. How will new energy hungry data centers be powered and how will Howard County ensure that these data centers are paying their fair share?

Water Usage: A major impact of data centers is their dependence on constant, large volumes of water. In most cases, data centers source their water from local public water utilities via their potable drinking water delivery systems. In some instances, particularly in remote or rural locations, data centers get water from wells, drawing from underlying aquifers. These public water supplies are responsible for serving all area consumers, including residences, businesses, public facilities, and farms. Typically, these public supplies draw from finite water sources that depend on rainfall to be replenished. Data centers become one more strain on these sources, competing with other users for the same finite resources. According to the Environmental and Energy Study Institute (EESI) large data centers can consume up to 5 million gallons per day, equivalent to the water use of a town populated by 10,000 to 50,000 people. How will Howard County ensure that residents and farms are insulated from water shortages and increased costs?

Tax Breaks for the world’s richest companies: Public handouts in the form of tax breaks that are going to data center developers, don’t bring meaningful economic development. Over the last year, Virginia and Georgia have given up more than a billion dollars’ worth of revenue as a result of tax breaks. That’s money that is being handed back to the industry rather than going into public funds that could pay for infrastructure, schools, or healthcare. How will Howard County ensure that data centers actually bring in revenue that benefits residents? One way is to end the sales [tax exemption law](#) established by the state in 2020 which gave authority to counties to exempt data centers from personal property tax. Howard County took advantage of this [law in 2020](#). CB31-2026 should direct the task force to look into amending or repealing this law ensuring that data centers contribute to the fiscal health of the county.

Noise: Data centers are inherently noisy. They are running their cooling systems basically 24/7, 365 days of the year, producing constant hums that can reach 85-100 dBA on-site. These sounds range in multiple frequencies. Low-frequency sounds and infrasound (deep, heavy vibrations) are notoriously difficult to block with traditional sound walls. They travel for hundreds of feet or even miles, often passing through walls and keeping residents awake which cause all sorts of health impacts especially for nearby residents as well as wildlife.

Howard County GHG emission goals: One hyper scale data center, or multiple small to medium data centers could make it impossible for the county to achieve its goals. Requirements need to be put in place to make sure the electrical power is coming from NEW, non-emitting, renewable sources.

Jobs: Construction of data centers do create short term employment because these are large construction projects, but these jobs last a year or two; sometimes with labor that is local and unionized, and sometimes that labor is trade professionals who come in from other states. Once the data center is up and running, it requires very few people, often just 20 to 50 staff members, because it's not an office for software developers, product managers, or marketing experts. It is a warehouse of servers. How will Howard County ensure that new data centers bring good paying jobs to Howard County residents?

The bullets below list some items that need to be considered and regulated, before data center development:

- Protect County Climate goals: GHG emissions goals that allow for county goals to be achieved - 100% carbon-free energy requirement from day one
 - Protect Air Quality: No fossil fuel combustion systems for emergency backup
 - Protect against Noise Pollution: Establish noise limits of 55 decibels at property lines for data center operations
 - Fence line noise and emission monitoring that is publicly available, with substantial penalties for violations
- Protect Water
- Define “large quantity water users” to include data centers
 - Using non-potable or recycled water
 - No PFAS
 - Establish rules for drought conditions
 - Require a robust water conservation plan with independent review
 - Consider liquid cooling vs evaporative cooling; water-scarce areas can prohibit evaporative air cooling
 - Require data centers pay for up-front infrastructure costs and tax water use with no exemptions - Increase tax rate during droughts
- Protect Land: Require parameters for compatible land use – restrict data centers near sensitive resources and facilities like park land, residential areas, day care facilities,, schools, hospitals, houses of worships, public transit, heat islands; protect overburdened and disproportionately impacted communities
 - Require electronic waste disposal – 100% recycling

- Require transparency and monthly reporting -Data centers and developers have to be held accountable for their claims about jobs, revenue and sustainability

Data centers may be in Howard County's future, but we can't fly the plane while building it. Before rushing headlong into new data center development, it's imperative that the County first address the potential harms and maximize the potential benefits.

For these reasons we urge a favorable report.

Howard County Climate Action

Support for CB31-2026

From Richard Love <ralove100@gmail.com>

Date Mon 5/18/2026 9:13 AM

To CouncilMail <CouncilMail@howardcountymd.gov>

Cc Richard Love <ralove100@gmail.com>; Rigby, Christiana <crigby@howardcountymd.gov>

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Howard County Council,

I write in support of CB31-2026, Councilwoman Christiana Rigby's bill that temporarily pauses approval new data centers in Howard County and establishes a task force to develop regulations and oversight to the benefit of Howard County residents.

Below are some of the considerations that I would like the task force to consider:

- **No Tax Incentives.** The data center developers ask for tax incentives with the claim that they will bring jobs to the community. While many workers may be employed during construction, operational teams are significantly much smaller ([1](#)). Short term, giving tax incentives for the construction of data centers provides minimal economic benefit to the community. Long term, data centers provide a retrograde economic benefit to the community.
- **Health Impacts.** It is well documented ([2](#)) that data centers are a serious health hazard to the surrounding communities because of pollution. The benefits of the data center go primarily to the health of the stock portfolios of the investors and not to the residential health of the community.
- **Inequality.** Data centers drive public inequality by disproportionately burdening communities with environmental hazards, increased utility bills, and resource depletion. Data centers shift wealth and quality of life away from the public good toward the tech industry ([3](#)).

Allowing data centers to construct these facilities without thorough oversight and regulation is akin to asking the residents of Howard County to pay out of pocket for an AI Golden Fleece.

Sincerely,

Richard Love
Kings Contrivance, Columbia MD
E: ralove100@gmail.com

Support for CB31-2026

From Sydney Figueiredo <sydfiga@gmail.com>
Date Sat 5/23/2026 7:20 PM
To CouncilMail <CouncilMail@howardcountymd.gov>

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Howard County Council,

I am writing to document my support for CB31-2026 as a Laurel, Maryland resident.

We are at a pivotal moment with regard to data centers in our country and Councilwoman Rigby's proposed moratorium is an integral step to setting ourselves up for success. While the economic benefit of data centers is often touted, there are clear environmental and social concerns that must be appropriately considered. This moratorium would allow for the task force to provide the council with specific guidance in creating appropriate legislation to protect people and our planet, while balancing realistic economic benefits.

I hope the council will vote to support this bill and protect Howard county residents while the necessary regulations are put in place. Many other counties are taking action and if we do not act accordingly, we will be left behind and subject to lasting exploitation.

Thank you,
Sydney Figueiredo
Berman Rd Laurel, MD
802-760-9130

TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF CB31-2026 (S.M.A.R.T. Siting Act) - June 1st Vote

From Smit Patel <smm25pa@gmail.com>

Date Sun 5/24/2026 11:41 AM

To CouncilMail <CouncilMail@howardcountymd.gov>

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Dear Chairperson and Members of the Howard County Council,

My name is Smit and I am a Howard County resident writing to urge your support for CB31-2026, the S.M.A.R.T. Siting Act, at the upcoming June 1st session.

Howard County's current zoning regulations are completely unequipped to handle the scale, noise, and resource consumption of modern data centers. Across Maryland, jurisdictions like Baltimore County and Montgomery County are pausing to study these impacts, and Howard County must be equally proactive.

Passing CB31-2026 does not mean stopping innovation; it means hitting the pause button so a specialized task force can evaluate how these energy-and-water-dense facilities affect our long-term infrastructure, environmental footprint, and residential neighborhoods.

With the upcoming election-year freeze on zoning changes lasting from June through December, we cannot afford a regulatory vacuum. Please vote YES on CB31-2026 to protect our communities and ensure smart planning.

Sincerely,
Smit, north laurel-20723, MD

CB31-2026

From Michelle Beaucher <mbeaucher1@gmail.com>
Date Tue 5/26/2026 11:41 AM
To CouncilMail <CouncilMail@howardcountymd.gov>

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Hello Howard County Council,

I am emailing in support of a moratorium on data center development. There are huge impacts from these centers that are not being assessed until after they are established. I live in Wellington Farms and the milk plant that is fully visible from my house should not be converted to a data center. Maryland already has had years of drought that result in water restrictions, a data center is going to strain that limited resource even more, the power grid needs to be upgraded to handle the current load not adding more strain to it, and the noise will pollute all of the local neighborhoods.

Thank you for the consideration for assessing data centers and their place in howard county.

Best Regards,
Michelle Beaucher
Wellington Farms resident

Support for CB31-2026

From Alyson Stolba <alystolba@gmail.com>
Date Wed 5/27/2026 6:24 PM
To CouncilMail <CouncilMail@howardcountymd.gov>

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Good afternoon,

I am in support of your proposed bill, CB31-2026 to place a moratorium on data centers.

I live in zip code 20723 and do not want these data centers built in Howard County.

Thank you
Alyson Stolba

Sent from my iPhone

I support CB31-2026

From Mestawet Shumye <mshumye2@gmail.com>

Date Wed 5/27/2026 1:51 PM

To CouncilMail <CouncilMail@howardcountymd.gov>

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Dear Councilwoman,

I hope you are doing well. I am writing to express my concern regarding the proposed data center development in our neighborhood. While I understand the importance of supporting economic growth and technology infrastructure, I support **CB31-2026** and respectfully ask that the long-term impact on residents and the surrounding community be carefully considered before moving forward with this project.

Many residents are concerned about increased noise, heavy traffic, environmental impact, strain on local utilities, and the overall effect on the character and quality of life in our neighborhood. Data centers also consume significant energy and water resources, which raises additional concerns about sustainability and future community planning.

Rather than converting the old milk center property into a data center, I would respectfully encourage consideration of alternative uses that would more directly benefit and engage the local community. The space could potentially be redeveloped into a community-centered facility such as:

- a youth and family recreation center
- community event and meeting space
- indoor farmers market
- public library extension or cultural center
- wellness and fitness facility
- green public space with community programs

A development focused on community engagement, education, recreation, and local small-business support would provide long-term value to residents while preserving the neighborhood environment and strengthening community connections.

I respectfully urge you to oppose or reconsider the proposed data center project until additional community input and alternative redevelopment options are thoroughly explored.

Thank you for your time, leadership, and consideration of the concerns of local residents. I sincerely appreciate your service to the community and your attention to this matter.

Sincerely,

Mestawet Shumye

7405 Declan Rd, Laurel MD, 20723
Wellington Farms neighbourhood

Support for CB31

From Anthony Varble <anthonyvarble@gmail.com>
Date Sun 5/31/2026 10:42 PM
To CouncilMail <CouncilMail@howardcountymd.gov>

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To the Howard County Council,

I am a resident of Howard County, and I wanted to state my support for CB31. As someone who will be affected because there is a data center potentially planned for an area less than a mile away from my house, I believe we need time to assess just how much damage this could do to our community. There are several major concerns I have: environmental damage and home value and livability reduction due to possible power surges, noise, and lights. I'm sure there are other issues that should be looked into as well, like even the sustainability of AI versus the actual profits to be made.

Please don't allow data centers to be built here without seeking the good of the residents first and foremost. Thank you so much for your time and consideration.

Respectfully,
Anthony Varble
7321 Isabella Road
Laurel MD 20723

Support for CB31

From Lois Kwon <lkwon21@gmail.com>

Date Sun 5/31/2026 10:37 PM

To CouncilMail <CouncilMail@howardcountymd.gov>

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To the Howard County Council,

I'd like to express my sincere support for CB31. The amount of information popping up all over the country about the negative impact data centers are having on local communities is alarming. I'm sure there are also unknown and invisible impacts they are having on local residents. One such example is of the noise pollution. On top of the excess noise many people are reporting, I imagine there are sound frequencies perhaps not audible to the human ear but that which we would be affected by without our knowledge unless extensive research is done first.

I urge you to consider both the short-term and long-term damage a data center in this area would have on all the residents of Howard County, myself included. I live within a mile of the Maola dairy plant and would be absolutely horrified if a data center was developed there. As a mother of 4 little children, I would have significant concerns about how it affects them and would likely consider moving out of the area if one were planned for this location. Please do not underestimate the potential damage this can have on our community. Human lives and quality of life cannot be disregarded in the name of digital and economic progress.

Thank you,

Lois Varble

7321 Isabella Rd, Laurel, MD 20723

Petition Against the establishment of Data Center in Laurel, MD

From Sumegha Shaw <sumeghashaw@gmail.com>

Date Sat 5/30/2026 8:29 PM

To CouncilMail <CouncilMail@howardcountymd.gov>

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Hello,

I am a resident of Wellington Farm Townhouses and would like to express my strong opposition to the proposed data center at the site of the former milk processing facility.

Since the establishment of our community, many residents in our community experienced significant quality-of-life impacts from the previous operation, including noise pollution, light pollution, and, at times, unpleasant odors. These issues negatively affected nearby homeowners and diminished residents' enjoyment of their properties.

Given that history, I am deeply concerned about replacing the former facility with a data center. While the operations may differ, data centers can also generate continuous noise, require substantial electrical infrastructure, and operate around the clock. The proposed proximity of the data center and the electrical substation to residential neighborhoods raises serious concerns about the long-term impact on nearby families and the character of our community.

Particularly concerning are the townhomes and residences located closest to the site. The individuals and families who live in the immediate vicinity would bear the greatest burden of any noise, lighting, traffic, visual impacts, or other disruptions associated with the project. Their quality of life should be a primary consideration in any decision regarding this development.

I appreciate the efforts being made to evaluate this proposal and respectfully urge decision-makers to reject the memorandum and any plans that would allow a data center to be developed at this location. Our community deserves development that enhances, rather than diminishes, the quality of life for its residents.

Thank you for your consideration.