



Frances Stewart, MD
Elders Climate Action Maryland

Bill 4-26, Buildings – Task Force on Data Centers Established
Hearing Date: February 24, 2026

Elders Climate Action is a nationwide organization devoted to ensuring that our children, grandchildren, and future generations have a world in which they can thrive. The Maryland Chapter has members across the state, including many in Montgomery County.

Each day, we see the climate crisis more clearly. We know Montgomery County is at risk for flooding from intense rainfall, heat waves, and other extreme weather events. The clean energy transition is an essential part of caring for our communities now and protecting our future and the future of our grandchildren.

We are deeply concerned about the rapid build-out of hyperscale data centers. Their extreme energy demands have the potential to significantly increase greenhouse gas emissions, undermine grid stability, raise electricity prices, and undermine efforts to electrify homes and businesses. There are also other major environmental impacts, such as water use, which must be addressed.

We are not opposed to data centers. We use them every day for email, online shopping, Zoom calls, and more, and we know that there are uses of artificial intelligence that can bring real benefits to our families and communities. But we must have thoughtful, well-designed guardrails and incentives to guide this development and prevent negative impacts.

Montgomery County is at a point where action is needed now to design and implement those guardrails and incentives. We appreciate the work of County Council members in that regard.

We have reviewed the information available from Terra Energy and Atmosphere LLC, Bill 4-26, and other information from Council members, the County Executive, and members of the public. We are also advocating for legislation regulating data centers at the state level.

We support Bill 4-26, but we believe it needs two important amendments. The first is to change the composition of the task force. The current proposal leans too heavily on the data center industry and utilities. We need a more diverse group of stakeholders and experts to ensure the public interest is well served. We recommend a smaller number of members from industry, more members representing environmental and consumer protection, and a resident of a community that currently has a hyperscale data center. It is also important to include an expert on the economic impacts of data centers who is not industry-affiliated.

The task force's work, analyzing the potential impacts of data centers in Montgomery County and exploring the policies needed, is clearly a complex undertaking. It should be informed by the state's data center impact and analysis study. The results of that study are due in September 2026, but may be delayed. Governor Moore vetoed the bill that required the study last spring. The General Assembly overrode the veto in December 2025. Because of that delay, the study started several months later than originally planned.

Also, the General Assembly is currently considering several data center bills that are likely to impact what Montgomery County needs to do. Because of this, we recommend that Bill 4-26 be amended to create a moratorium on the approval and construction of new data centers. That would give the County time to consider the results of the state data center study and any new state legislation that may pass this session, consult with a diverse group of stakeholders and experts, and craft the policies we need.

Thank you.