

Maryland lawmakers override veto, will study impact of data centers



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A bipartisan group of Maryland lawmakers voted Tuesday to require state agencies to **study the impact of data centers**, overriding Gov. Wes Moore's veto, as the facilities are increasingly setting up in Maryland.

Moore vetoed the bill setting up the study and two others, arguing in a May letter that the state's budget situation requires the state to reconsider bills establishing "expensive and labor intensive studies." The other two studies were to focus on youth technology use and the cost of greenhouse gas emissions; the climate study was **funded by the governor** days ahead of the special session.

"While such bills can be a first step to addressing complex issues and allow the signaling of support for an issue, the practice has become so commonplace that it is now a significant financial and staff burden on the state government," Moore wrote in May. "In addition, such reporting requirements have at times delayed prompt action on important issues."

The Maryland General Assembly considered on Tuesday the 29 vetoes Moore made following the 2025 session. The state legislature had reconvened a special session to elect a new speaker of the House, **Joseline Peña-Melnyk**, a Democrat from Anne Arundel and Prince George's counties.

The data center study override, which required three-fifths approval in both chambers, passed the House 111-24 and the Senate 44-0. The original bill was brought by Sens. Karen Lewis Young, a Democrat from Frederick County, and Justin

Ready, a Republican representing Frederick and Carroll counties. The House bill was sponsored by Brian Crosby, a St. Mary's County Democrat.

"Before we have massive investments in bringing data centers here, we really ought to do a full-on operational look at everything," Ready said in an interview Monday.

The bill will require state agencies and the University of Maryland School of Business to study the impact of data center development in Maryland on the state's environment, energy and economy. The act was set to take effect in July and end in June 2027, with the study to be completed by September 2026. The study is estimated to cost the state \$502,000, according to a fiscal and policy note.

In an interview following the Senate vote, Lewis Young said that since the veto, there has been growing bipartisan support for researching data centers in Maryland. The main area for data centers expansion in May was Frederick County, the senator said, but now data centers are being considered across the state, including in Baltimore, Montgomery and Prince George's counties. She believes the governor might not have vetoed the study if he were making the decision in December.

"There's a lot of government elected officials that are eager for the revenue opportunities without fully understanding the reality," Lewis Young said.

Moore's team, when asked about Lewis Young's supposition that he might not have vetoed the data center bill now, responded: "While I disagree with this decision to override some of the vetoes I made last session, I respect the General Assembly exercising its constitutional authority."

While the Senate vote was unanimous, several delegates supported the veto, including Maryland House Freedom Caucus Chair Del. Matthew Morgan, a Republican from St. Mary's County, who argued that the study could slow down progress on regulating data centers, pointing to a bill he is planning that would require data centers to produce their own power.

"This bill doesn't stop any data centers from being built. What it does is delay any decision about data centers," Morgan said.

Moore pushed legislation that passed in 2024 to simplify regulations on backup power generators to encourage data centers to come to Maryland.

Tech companies are increasingly looking at Maryland to place data centers, such as one set for **Frederick** and early plans for one in **Woodlawn**, following a surge in new

data centers in nearby Virginia. However, some are concerned that the large amount of energy required to power data centers could strain the state's energy grid and cause environmental harm because of the amount of power and water needed. The number of data centers nationwide, which have existed for over half a century, has increased greatly in recent years, with the rise of artificial intelligence driving growth.

Sen. William Folden, a Frederick County Republican, said he is concerned about the homes near the planned data center in his county and the impact of the center on a nearby elementary school.

Baltimore County Democrat Sen. Charles Sydnor, whose district includes Woodlawn, said he is concerned that his constituents could be harmed by a proposed data center and not receive any significant benefits. Experts he has spoken to, Sydnor said, have said data centers in Maryland and elsewhere in the country are being approved in a "poorly planned, chaotic process," lacking regulatory frameworks.

"Residents of District 44 deserve a guarantee that they will not face the environmental harm and shoulder the cost only to get scraps of the benefits," Sydnor said. "My constituents are entitled to answers, not false promises."

Have a news tip? Contact Katharine Wilson at kwilson@baltsun.com.