

Testimony Supporting HB438 / SB560
House Economic Matters Committee / Senate Finance Committee
February 20, 2020 / February 25, 2020

Position: SUPPORT

My name is Terrel Askew and I'm a Leadership Organizer with United Workers. I'm a lifelong Baltimorean, residing in the 43rd district. I have at least two people in my family who suffered from asthma: my aunt and her son. They lived in East Baltimore, along the truck routes where the trash is hauled to the incinerator. They are both gone now, I may never know just how much the trash burning affected them.

Maryland needs to remove Incineration from its RPS because incineration is a 19th century solution to a 21st century problem. We are producing more goods than at any other time in history. A great deal of these products are not reusable and have a limited shelf life, which is completely unsustainable. Their production is a drain on our natural resources and their consumption provides more waste for landfills.

Incineration does nothing to address this growing problem, and to the contrary, encourages us to buy more. What it does do is take away precious resources from alternatives like composting and recycling, which would reduce our current waste; and policymaking that would reduce our litter stream. If this was all the harm, these subsidies would be fiscally irresponsible; but no, it gets worse.

Burning our waste releases harmful toxins such as mercury, lead, carbon monoxide, nitrogen oxide, and fine particulate matter into the air we breathe and the water sources we depend upon. These substances are known to cause respiratory issues such as asthma, as well as birth defects, cancer, heart problems, and even death.

Given their locations, the communities that suffer the most are usually low income and persons of color; not to mention animal life, who have little say in the matter. The Environmental Integrity Project released a report that showed that Baltimore City's rate of asthma hospitalizations is more than twice the state's, and nearly 3x the nation's. So what we as ratepayers are actually subsidizing is the decimation of our own communities, both marine and human.

And for what? Due to the by-products of incineration, we are still using landfills to bury the two types of ash created. Amounting to about a third of the total waste, fly ash and bottom ash require special hazardous landfills to dispose of them properly. This creates a possibility for further contamination of the soil we use to grow our food. This is a recipe for disaster, one that we could be minimizing by building up our zero waste infrastructure. We in Baltimore City have already started to do just that. The Commission on Sustainability has released a plan for zero waste, the Mayor is focused on doubling recycling rates and there is ongoing discussion about locating a public composting facility in the city.

Actual clean, green energy sources like wind and solar provide more jobs than incineration, and are healthier choices for us and our planet. Similarly, zero waste jobs such as recycling and composting create five to ten times more jobs than incineration ever could. We need only to act: to stop subsidizing our fears and misinformation, put that money toward strengthening the zero waste infrastructure we already have, and to stand firm with the communities, human and animal, man-made and nature-made, with whom we share our most basic resource...the earth. Please support HB438/SB560. Thank you.