

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

Position: SUPPORT

Dear Senators and Delegates representing the diverse areas and interests of the state of Maryland:

My name is TJ Butler and I live in the Hampden area of Baltimore. I rarely drive, so I do not get the opportunity to always see the BRESKO/Wheelabrator incinerator, the “Welcome Sign” for Baltimore. As one of the delegates pointed out, it’s a little weird to have a flaming pile of trash as your welcome sign, but Baltimore is certainly a special place. Although I don’t see BRESKO, I do get to smell it. As the city’s largest air polluter contributing \$55 million to adverse health costs, I worry about the damage I do to myself by trying to live a more sustainable life through commuting by bike. I choose to bike to work as an effort to save money, because one day I would like to invest in a community solar project within the city. It could give Baltimore residents preferential access to affordable energy, ideally financed in a community-ownership model. In order to do that though, we would likely need a little bit of stimulus from the local and state levels.

Speaking of help with the funding, currently BRESKO/Wheelabrator gets millions of dollars to burn trash from ratepayers. Instead of helping fund the incinerator, we could remove subsidies for trash incineration through **HB438** and **SB560** and use that money to support truly green energy. There are quite a few solar-oriented businesses operating right in Maryland including Neighborhood Sun and Navitas Solar, who both have interesting business models and have great opportunities to absorb additional funding and create many additional jobs. These companies, with additional funding, will provide new jobs and grow to meet solar and wind demand in the city of Baltimore and the state of Maryland in general, without the high levels of pollution BRESKO/Wheelabrator currently generate (more greenhouse gas per unit energy than coal).

Speaking of jobs, over 80% of what the incinerator burns could be composted or recycled. This would reclaim the utility of these materials to be used as food for the soil and inputs for other industrial processes. An example of this in action is the Filbert Street Garden and Baltimore Compost Collective. What are issues that bring people together? Jobs? Youth empowerment? The circular economy? Becoming resilient in the face of climate change? The Baltimore Compost Collective with Filbert Street Garden addresses all of these issues by composting food scraps locally, employing youth from the local high school to create “black gold” that gets used right onsite at the garden, which then produces agricultural goods that are sold at farmers markets within the city. Now what if Baltimore and the state of Maryland used resources to grow these home-grown businesses, rather than a polluting giant that is already old and highly automated limiting future job growth?

Speaking of composting and recycling, the city has taken several initiatives to show support for a Zero Waste program. The 2019 Sustainability Plan has a goal of diverting 90% of its waste from incinerators and landfills. What’s interesting is that this is almost a trailing goal: recycling rates could be improved by providing free recycling bins, composting companies and community gardens are leading the way, and Styrofoam bans along with bans of other single-use materials are going to make this a non-negotiable reality being built right now. It seems like a good time to hop aboard the sustainable, just economy train.

Look committed to your constituents by supporting the removal of public subsidies for trash incineration. By removing these subsidies for incineration and putting them toward truly clean energy, we can help create jobs in the clean energy and zero waste economies and ensure that Maryland ratepayers are no longer forced to pay to pollute our own air.

Please support HB438/SB560 and end subsidies for trash incineration in Maryland. I’m very excited by the possibilities in the green economy. Thank you very much for your time.

Sincerely,
TJ Butler