



Olivia Bartlett, DoTheMostGood

Committee: Ways and Means

Testimony on: HB0150 – Public Schools - Grant Program to Reduce and Compost School Waste

Position: Favorable

Hearing Date: January 27, 2022

Bill Contact: Delegate Lorig Charkoudian

DoTheMostGood (DTMG) is a progressive grass-roots organization with more than 3000 members across all districts in Montgomery County as well as a number of nearby jurisdictions. DTMG supports legislation and activities that keep residents healthy and safe in a clean environment and which promote equity across all our diverse communities. DTMG strongly supports HB0150 because it will help feed hungry students, help our environment by reducing emission of greenhouse gas, and help our communities by increasing production of valuable compost.

Maryland wastes tons of food each year, and much of the wasted food comes from Maryland schools. Most of the wasted food ends up in landfills or in incinerators. Rotting food in landfills releases methane, a greenhouse gas that is 86 times more potent than carbon dioxide in its first 20 years in the atmosphere. We must dramatically reduce emissions of methane if we are to slow global warming and climate change.

Maryland also has a hunger crisis: 1 in 7 children in Maryland face hunger or are food insecure. Allowing edible food to go to waste is also a missed opportunity in the school food value chain.

HB0150 offers innovative solutions to both of these serious problems by creating a new competitive grant program to support school-based initiatives to prevent, reduce, and compost pre- and post-consumer food waste. The primary goals of these initiatives are to feed hungry students and to reduce plate waste before the food becomes inedible. Initiatives under the grant program could, for example, include education and training for both staff and parents on food waste reduction. HB0150 also allows for the development of innovative systems to maximize opportunities to serve food that has already been prepared, such as providing it to students during after school activities or as take-home meals. Diverting otherwise edible but potentially wasted food to these children could be an essential source of nutrition for them.

HB0150 would also support contracts with commercial composters and the purchase of on-site composting bins to turn wasted food into compost. An ongoing pilot program in Montgomery County has shown that even young elementary school students are eager to learn about composting and reliably separate compostable items from trash after lunch. Compost is a valuable soil amendment that enhances soil fertility, soil water-holding capacity, soil organic matter, and soil structure. In addition to farming and gardens, compost can be used to manage stormwater run-off and prevent soil erosion, in rain gardens, green roofs, bioswales, compost filter socks, and other "green infrastructure" projects.

Finally, keeping food waste out of landfills will reduce the production of methane, which will help Maryland reach its greenhouse gas reduction goals.

HB0150 offers an elegant solution to vexing problems, will help feed more people, and will help solve a critical waste issue. Therefore, DTMG strongly supports HB0150 and urges a **FAVORABLE** report on this bill.

Respectfully submitted,

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