

HB0150 - Support

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Education Health and Environmental Affairs Committee

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Dear Chair Pinsky and Members of the Ways and Means Committee,

I am writing to express my support for HB0150, sponsored by Delegate Charkoudian, which will create a grant program to support schools in developing programs to prevent, reduce, and compost food waste.

For the past two years, I have been working with the non-profit Lunch Out of Landfills to bring the program to my school, Oakdale High School, and expand the program to other schools throughout Maryland. Our mission is to enable students K-12 to become “Solutionists”, rather than simply advocates, to address our planet’s climate emergency by reducing food waste. This student-driven initiative incorporates a systemic change by introducing composting, effective recycling, and food recovery. The goal is to change the deep-rooted issue of food waste and create a new lifestyle that will continue for generations.

We have found that there needs to be monetary support at the beginning of a school’s composting journey when the diversion rate does not match or minimize the cost of the pre-established trash collections. Typically at the beginning of a school’s transition to composting the diversion rate is approximately thirty to forty percent. However, as students

adapt and it simply becomes a way of life, up to eighty percent of organic waste is diverted from the landfill. This success is consistently shown in Green Valley Elementary School. Since August 2021, they have generated roughly 16,300 pounds of trash and only 2,700 pounds went to the dumpster. This bill would play a key role in promoting the ideals of Lunch Out of Landfills. By providing grants to schools that are ready to make the change, there would be a relatively seamless transition, and an impactful change would last for the generations to come.

My passion for this was ignited when I took an AP Environmental Science class and truly began to learn the anthropogenic impact we have on Earth. This made me realize that the most potent greenhouse gas - methane - is caused directly by organic waste in landfills and nothing was being done to solve this problem. From then it evolved into implementing sustainable lifestyle changes in my personal life and beginning to educate others on the matter as well. As I reached other students we realized our detrimental habits needed to change immediately, and since then the student initiatives to implement food recovery and diversion have grown exponentially. I knew I couldn't wait another 5 years to have my Environmental Engineering degree to make a difference, and likewise, we cannot wait any longer to make the change that this bill would elevate.

With 200 additional schools in Maryland - and even other schools across the nation - looking to adopt the composting program next year, this bill needs to be passed immediately. Food recovery is one of the top elements in reducing climate warming and even reversing it. Waste is a human invention. We can either ignore the problem or we can make the change for our future; We are the generation to make the change, I hope you choose to sustain our future by passing HB0150. Thank you.

Best regards,

Paige Smith