

HB 150 - SUPPORT
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HB 150 SUPPORT
Public Schools-Grant Program to Reduce and Compost School Waste

Ways and Means Committee
January 27th, 2022

Dear Chair Atterbeary, Vice Chair Washington, and Members of the Ways and Means Committee:

My name is Javier Fuentes, and I am the president of the Laurel High School Green Club. My goal is to create a better, greener future, which is why I am testifying in favor of HB 150.

At Laurel High, we were the first high school in Prince George's county to start a composting program in January 2020. Today, we are once again collaborating with the City of Laurel to restart and improve our composting program after it was stopped due to the pandemic. Although our school is privileged enough to be provided materials to restart composting, the limitations to our project are evident. Students are eager to participate in environmental projects, but it is difficult to maintain that same enthusiasm towards composting when there is no schoolwide education on it. This is mainly because effective practices like composting, which divert food from landfills to reduce methane emissions and produce better vegetation by adding nutrients to soil, are still not normalized and a common practice in many places, let alone school systems.

Voting in favor of HB 150 will help develop habits that promote environmental education that carry over to a sustainable home life and improve the health of the public. Especially in lower-income communities like mine, it is important to note that we are more vulnerable than others to the damaging health effects of climate change, and implementing waste reduction practices in schools will not only create surplus food which can be given to student families, but will also empower communities like mine to develop habits to resist the disproportionate effects of climate change.

Back in 2019 when the Laurel High School Green Club first conducted a waste audit, or reviewing cafeteria waste to determine how much is compostable, I remember everyone—including myself—wafting a trash bin, gagging, and vigorously waving our hands around our face to rid our memory of that terrible smell. Once the waste audit was over, we

determined that nearly 90% of the waste produced in the cafeteria was compostable. I also saw the smiles on everyone's faces, and realized that if students are able to interact and learn about the impacts of a process like composting, then they will genuinely want to make a difference in their own lives and their community, and will carry the knowledge and experience with them for the rest of their lives.

To me, this bill is an investment for the future of my generation. Supporting this bill would mean that schools that do not have resources like composting bins or contracts with a composting company, schools that do not have the support with a large student environmental group or help from another organization, can turn to the grant program as a reassurance that the future is in the hands of the composter.

Therefore, I urge a favorable report on HB 150.