



Mission: To improve public health in Maryland through education and advocacy Vision: Healthy Marylanders living in Healthy Communities

HB 150, Public Schools – Grant Program to Reduce and Compost School Waste

Hearing Date: Wednesday, January 27, 2022

Committee: Ways and Means Committee

Position: SUPPORT

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

Rising temperatures, disruption to the food supply, more frequent infectious and vector-borne diseases, fires, excessive greenhouse gas emissions - are climate risks that directly impact public health. The Maryland Public Health Association (MdPHA) is keenly aware that we must take proactive steps to prevent the health effects of climate change. In turn, we strongly support SB150, the Public Schools Grant Program to Reduce and Compost School Waste. We urge your committee to support it too, and value its lasting benefits.

Composting is one of the simplest and most effective ways to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, reduce food waste, and improve mental health for students who want to act against climate change. When composting is done in schools, it also raises sharp awareness about food waste and – at the same time - helps us address food insecurity. Students throughout Maryland are eager to find climate solutions they can take part in. Composting and food recovery efforts at schools are clear and positive investments for our students.

As you likely know, landfills and incinerators are the 3rd largest source of greenhouse gasses in the United States, with high carbon and methane emissions. These dangerous gasses are created simply because wet foods (organic materials) are trapped under plastics to decompose anaerobically and release toxins. In incinerators foods are inefficiently burned to create particulate matter and ash that leaches into our waterways. It's illogical: you don't throw a melon rind in the fireplace, right? Simply removing foods from landfills and incinerators and enabling them to naturally compost not only creates nutrient-rich soil with which to grow new food, but the soil captures carbon as it composts (removing gases from the air). Composting is an under-appreciated climate solution.

In schools, student-led waste sorts show that 86-90% of cafeteria waste could be diverted. Over 70% of cafeteria waste is either from food or liquids like unused milk or juice. It's unethical that we don't automatically share uneaten apples, bananas, milks and other foods kids currently, and instinctively, throw away. We must do a better job to teach our students about food waste, and that that there is no "away". We must make proactive plans to adjust the way we manage the food waste problem beyond our schools, throughout Maryland.

The MdPHA thanks Delegates Charkoudian and Solomon for introducing this very positive, purposeful, and wise bill to move Maryland in the right direction with respect to food waste. SB124 is a great investment – a smart start.

The Maryland Public Health Association (MdPHA) is a nonprofit, statewide organization of public health professionals dedicated to improving the lives of all Marylanders through education, advocacy, and collaboration. We support public policies consistent with our vision of healthy Marylanders living in healthy, equitable, communities.