

**Testimony Supporting HB0166**

**Economic Matters Committee**

**March 5, 2024**

**Position: SUPPORT**

**Submitted by: Dave Arndt**

Dear Chair and Members of the Committee,

As a resident of Baltimore, MD, I am writing to express my strong support of HB0166, which will make sure that our subsidies for renewable energy through the Renewable Portfolio Standard are going toward actual renewable energy. We are in a climate crisis, and we cannot afford to be spending our renewable energy money on facilities that emit greenhouse gasses - now is the time to double down Maryland's commitment to truly renewable energy and subsidize only facilities that are emissions-free.

Burning trash pollutes the environment, harms nearby communities' health, and contribute to climate change: a bad investment of public dollars that every Maryland utility ratepayer contributes to. Every Renewable Energy Credit that goes toward a facility that emits greenhouse gasses is a Renewable Energy Credit taken away from a facility that does not - an egregious waste of public money.

Because of the inclusion of these polluters in the Renewable Portfolio Standard, Maryland ratepayers paid over \$30 million to buy Renewable Energy Credits from facilities that emit greenhouse gasses in 2020, and over \$246 million since 2008. The Public Employees for Environmental Responsibility estimates that if nothing changes, those costs will mount to half a billion dollars subsidizing polluters by 2030. Please support HB0166 so that those dollars can go toward supporting wind, solar, hydro, and geothermal power - not greenhouse gas emissions.

The Baltimore region ranks among the worst in the U.S. for air pollution. Baltimore has two active trash incinerators and decades of pollution from both active and decommissioned industrial factories. A study by the Chesapeake Bay Foundation in 2017 found air quality in the region was ranked moderate or worse one of every three days, according to the EPA's Air Quality Index. The same study notes poor air quality triggers asthma and can cause other health issues. Little wonder then that children in Baltimore City have asthma at twice the rate of the rest of the country, and the hospitalization rate for pediatric asthma is one of the highest in the nation, as a 2017 report by the Environmental Integrity Project showed.

The private-equity-owned Bresco/Wheelabrator incinerator—recently rebranded, or greenwashed, as WIN Waste Innovations—is alongside six communities of color and low-income communities, which fits a pattern of environmental and social injustice around the world. The Bresco incinerator has been burning around 700,000 tons of waste every year for 35 years and is the city's single worst air polluter. The Chesapeake Bay Foundation study found that the illness and ailments caused by air polluted by the incineration alone cost \$55 million a year in health damages to residents. This is just one of the heavy costs dumped on Black and poor residents by a private corporation. Because Maryland classifies incineration as recycling, Bresco receives state subsidies for renewable energy—nearly \$10 million over the past six years. In addition, Baltimore pays an extra \$52 per ton to burn trash.

## **Community Impact**

When I do Composting Workshops at schools, I ask if they are affected by asthma and cancer. The response is that 98% of the students have asthma, and several of their family members have cancer. At this point, to illustrate the effects to me, the teacher opens a desk drawer, and pulls out a storage bag full of inhalers. Most of these schools can't field a youth athletic team due to the students having compromised respiratory issues.

### **Subsidizing dirty energy is a bad deal for Maryland.**

- Maryland RPS program spends millions of dollars on a Virginia biomass facility that is too dirty to qualify for Virginia's own recently-enacted RPS.
- Most RPS facilities are located outside of Maryland provide no energy to Maryland energy suppliers. Trash incinerators in Maryland provide less than 1% of all of Maryland's electricity. There loss would not be noticed in Maryland.
- Emissions from dirty energy sources in the RPS overwhelm emission reductions from truly renewable energy. In its 2019 [report](#) reviewing the RPS in response to 2017's HB1414, the Maryland Department of Natural Resources found that our state's RPS "has played a small role" in emissions reductions, and had nothing to do with most of the reductions in CO2 emissions we have seen in the past two decades. As of 2017, grid-wide CO2 emissions per megawatt hour , "PJM-wide CO2 emissions per MWh in 2017, the latest year available, were approximately 0.8% lower than they would have been absent the Maryland RPS, assuming all retired RECs supported resources that would not have operated otherwise." Under the status quo, Maryland's RPS is not doing enough to drive down greenhouse gas emissions.
- In its 2019 [report](#) reviewing the RPS in response to 2017's HB1414, the Maryland Department of Natural Resources found that the pollution from combustion-based energy sources included in the RPS is so great that Maryland RPS energy sources, on average, pollute as much or more SO2 and NOx than the grid as a whole - pollutants that significantly contribute to asthma and other health hazards.

### **Subsidizing trash incineration and landfill gas tilts the playing field against healthier, cheaper waste management.**

- When the RPS was created in 2004, trash incineration was in "Tier 2" of the RPS and received lower subsidies than they actually renewable energy in Tier 1, and those smaller subsidies were to be phased out by 2019. It wasn't until 2011, in response to intense industry pressure, that incineration was made permanently a part of the same subsidized category as wind and solar.
- New trash incinerators were proposed for Baltimore City and Frederick and Carroll Counties, but residents campaigned and prevented them from being built because of the enormous pollution burden and economic costs they would have brought. In Baltimore City and Montgomery County, home of Maryland's remaining incinerators, residents are actively campaigning to close them as well.
- To produce the same amount of energy, Maryland's two subsidy-receiving incinerators emit higher levels of mercury, lead, nitrogen oxides (NOx), carbon monoxide (CO), and carbon dioxide

(CO<sub>2</sub>) than Maryland's coal plants. In 2015, the BRESCO incinerator in Baltimore emitted about twice as much greenhouse gases per amount of energy produced, on average, as each of the coal plants located in Maryland.

- Artificial subsidies make incinerators seem artificially cheaper compared to methods of managing our waste that produce neither pollution nor energy: like composting, repurposing, and source reduction. Although trash incineration and producing methane from waste receive RPS subsidies for producing energy despite their pollution impacts, composting is better for the environment than either. [According to the EPA](#): “composting lowers greenhouse gases by improving carbon sequestration in the soil and by preventing methane emissions through aerobic decomposition, as methane-producing microbes are not active in the presence of oxygen.” 50% of the average municipal waste stream can be composted.

For all of these reasons and many more, please support HB0166 and end “renewable energy” subsidies for greenhouse gas emitting energy sources in Maryland. Thank you.

Dave Arndt

Retired Chemical Engineer and Climate, Environmental and Social Justice Advocate