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Susan O'Neill, Chair

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Testimony in Support of
Senate Bill 808 – Anaerobic Digestion Technology - Coordination and Guidance
Senate Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee
March 5, 2024

The Rural Maryland Council supports Senate Bill 808 – Anaerobic Digestion Technology - Coordination and Guidance. The bill proposes that the Department of Agriculture collaborates with the Maryland Energy Administration, the Department of the Environment, the Department of Commerce, the University of Maryland College of Agriculture and Natural Resources, and other relevant stakeholders to ensure that the implementation of anaerobic digestion technology projects is not delayed unnecessarily. Additionally, the Department, in partnership with certain State agencies, is required to provide guidance to farmers on the development and implementation of anaerobic digestion technology.

Anaerobic digestion is a biological method to create renewable energy, in the form of methane (CH₄)–enriched biogas, from organic rich substrates, such as manure, food waste, and wastewater sludge. The Rural Maryland Council has been working to develop more relationships with farmers and institutional systems in support of the use of anaerobic digestion.

In 2013, ECOCORP, Inc. completed the construction of an anaerobic digester facility at the Eastern Correction Institution in Somerset County. The anaerobic digester supplies a portion of the power needed at the prison. The digester uses heat to deodorize and sterilize manure, while using the methane gas it produces to generate electricity.

In 2018, the Department of Agriculture awarded a \$1.85 million grant to Kilby Farm, LLC in Cecil County to install an anaerobic digester at its 400-dairy operation. The project represents a retrofit to an existing, but non-operational, digestive system that created a reliable power supply for the farm throughout the year. A digester can benefit farmers as it can provide a new source of income for them - biomethane, electricity, heat, and biofuel can be sent to the department of energy to be sold to other farms. Additionally, the use of cow manure in the methane digester reduces the greenhouse gas emissions that would otherwise be produced in livestock operations.

In 2021, Bioenergy Development Company completed the construction of an anaerobic digestion facility on the Maryland Food Center campus in Jessup. This is the largest anaerobic digester in the state and has the potential to divert approximately 125,000 tons of food waste generated per year from landfill disposal and produce enough energy to power 4,800 homes. In addition to reducing greenhouse gas emissions and creating renewable energy, it will also improve Maryland's recycling processes and create up to 50 new jobs.

The Council supports and encourages anaerobic digestion technology to benefit farmers, institutional systems, and the environment.

The Rural Maryland Council respectfully requests your favorable support of Senate Bill 808.

The Rural Maryland Council (RMC) is an independent state agency governed by a nonpartisan, 40-member board that consists of inclusive representation from the federal, state, regional, county, and municipal governments, as well as the for-profit and nonprofit sectors. We bring together federal, state, county, and municipal government officials as well as representatives of the for-profit and nonprofit sectors to identify challenges unique to rural communities and to craft public policy, programmatic or regulatory solutions.

“A Collective Voice for Rural Maryland”