

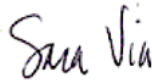
January 23, 2024

**To: Senate Education, Energy and the Environment Committee**

**Re: Testimony in support of SB146**

**Position: SUPPORT**

**From: Dr. Sara Via**, Professor and Climate Extension Specialist,  
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I am a resident of District 9B and a Maryland electricity ratepayer. I strongly support SB146 because it will stop the subsidy of highly polluting dirty energy from trash incineration. In 2022, almost \$25 million RPS dollars from Maryland ratepayers supported the generation of dirty power from incineration, with half of it going out-of-state to the Lorton incinerator. If these funds were used instead to support clean renewable energy generated in Maryland, we could create jobs for hard-working Marylanders while advancing Maryland's ambitious climate goals.

It's crucial to distinguish "renewable energy" from "clean energy". Using these terms interchangeably has been an ongoing problem in the RPS and this is the crux of the issue addressed in SB146. Burning trash is technically "renewable" since there is a seemingly endless supply. But energy from incineration is by no means "clean," and it should not be subsidized by Maryland ratepayers.

**It is past time to clean up the RPS and use Maryland ratepayer dollars to subsidize only clean renewable energy.** Cleaning up the RPS will neither prohibit incineration nor prohibit incinerator companies from receiving RPS funds from other states. It will just remove subsidies for incineration from Maryland ratepayers so that our RPS funds can be used to support truly clean energy. This is what both the RPS and Maryland's Climate Pollution Reduction Plan are all about.

The initial [statute defining the RPS](#) asserted that that ensuring a certain proportion of renewable energy in the overall portfolio would benefit Marylanders through "LONG-TERM DECREASED EMISSIONS, (and) A HEALTHIER ENVIRONMENT." At that time, it may have seemed reasonable to think that energy from each renewable source allowed in Tier 1 would cause lower emissions than electricity made by burning fossil fuels. Now we know that isn't true. Generating power with incineration releases more greenhouse gases per watt than any other form of electricity generation<sup>1</sup>.

Incinerating municipal solid waste also releases even more hazardous air pollution than burning coal—5x more NO<sub>x</sub>, twice as much carbon monoxide (CO) and 17x more mercury<sup>2</sup>. A large fraction of municipal waste is plastic, and we know that burning plastic releases some very hazardous volatiles and particulates into the air. **Why would we subsidize dirty energy that damages the environment and reduces the health of Marylanders and call it a climate solution?**

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<sup>1</sup> Tangri, N. 2023. Waste incinerators undermine clean energy goals. PLOS Clim. 2(6): e0000100.  
<https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pclm.0000100> .

<sup>2</sup> Public Employees for Environmental Responsibility. 2022. *Maryland's Clean Energy Program Isn't So Clean*. Accessed 2/26/23 from <https://peer.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/02/PEER-Report-Maryland-RPS-2.21.22-Final.pdf>.

The trash problem is often used to justify incineration as if there are no options. But we can deal with trash sustainably by implementing waste reduction programs reducing single-use plastics and improving rates of recycling. We could also disallow all organic material (food and yard waste) from landfills, instead diverting it to greatly expanded modern composting facilities. Yes, recycling is currently inefficient and inadequate. But recycling is not only a problem we CAN solve, it's a problem we MUST solve to build the circular economy we require for the future.

We simply can't keep throwing stuff away and then pretending to deal with it through incineration.

Because incineration is not a climate solution, allowing it to be subsidized in the RPS deceives Maryland ratepayers. They pay for the RPS **thinking** that they are helping to curb climate change and speed the transition to clean energy. Instead, they are spending millions each year to enrich companies that increase deadly air pollution and speed up climate change.

Maryland is better than this. As our legislators, you have the power to change the RPS so that it will function as it should. By using RPS funds to subsidize only *bona fide* clean energy sources like wind and solar, this legislation will help to speed the energy transition we so desperately need.

Once the cost of dirty energy from incinerators is no longer artificially lowered by RPS funds, it will be easier for communities to justify the cost of real climate solutions for waste. They can develop workable recycling programs and efficient ways to divert food and yard waste from landfills into composting facilities. The valuable soil amendment produced by composting organic waste will enrich gardens and farmland and even increase the resilience of Maryland agriculture to climate change<sup>3</sup>.

I look forward to the expansion of wind and solar in Maryland and the production of thousands of good-paying jobs in the clean energy industry for hard-working Marylanders.

Please help to facilitate the clean energy transition in Maryland. Remove incineration from Tier 1.

Thank you!

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<sup>3</sup> Via, S. 2021. *Increasing Soil Health and Sequestering Carbon in Agricultural Soils: A Natural Climate Solution*. The Izaak Walton League of America and the National Wildlife Federation. Available at <https://www.iwla.org/soils-agriculture/soilhealthreport>.