

Committee: Environment and Transportation

Testimony on: HB 338 – “State Buildings and State Highways – Collection and Disposal of Yard Waste”

Position: Support

Hearing Date: February 5, 2025

The Maryland Chapter of the Sierra Club supports HB 338, which would prohibit the use of single-use plastic containers for collection of yard waste by State employees or contractors on the grounds of a State building or State highway, and would require that collected yard waste be composted, recycled, or mulched. The bill exempts removal and disposal of noxious weeds and invasive species from these requirements.

HB 338 would reduce pollution from plastic yard waste bags used for State buildings and highways and ensure that the collected yard waste is not disposed in a landfill, where it would generate methane, a powerful greenhouse gas, as it decomposes in the absence of oxygen. Yard waste sent to composting facilities in plastic bags can result in substantial plastic pollution and contamination of the compost (see Exhibit 1).

According to correspondence with the Department of Legislative Services, the three departments that are most involved in yard waste removal are the Department of General Services (DGS), the Department of Transportation (MDOT), and the Department of Natural Resources (DNR). DGS already uses reusable containers to dispose of yard waste and MDOT usually collects a large volume of yard waste using heavy machinery that transports it directly to their destination. However, DNR and its contractors sometimes do use single-use plastic containers for yard waste, in some cases to contain invasive species and listed noxious weeds.

It is likely that yard waste collected from State buildings and highways in some parts of the State are using plastic bags in collection and/or are disposing of yard waste in landfills. Based on a review of their websites, at least thirteen counties do not accept yard waste in plastic bags.¹ However, the City of Baltimore and the City of Salisbury explicitly require that yard waste be placed in a plastic bag. The websites of seven counties made no mention of concern for the type of yard waste bags. Some counties direct yard waste to a landfill, not a composting facility.

Reducing plastic pollution in the environment and the release of methane in landfills is important and the cost of compliance by State agencies is minimal, according to the fiscal and policy note. We respectfully request a favorable report on HB 338.

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Attachment: Exhibit 1 - Shredded plastic bag waste at the Prince George’s County Yard Waste Facility in 2013, before a ban on plastic yard waste bags was enforced

¹ Anne Arundel, Baltimore County, Caroline, Cecil, Charles, Frederick, Harford, Howard, Montgomery, Prince George’s, St. Mary’s, Somerset, and Washington (Hagerstown & Boonsboro). Garrett does not accept biodegradable yard waste bags and Worcester does not accept yard waste bags in general. In some of these places, yard waste is sent to a landfill; it is not clear in all cases whether the yard waste is being sent to a composting facility or a landfill.

Founded in 1892, the Sierra Club is America’s oldest and largest grassroots environmental organization. The Maryland Chapter has over 70,000 members and supporters, and the Sierra Club nationwide has approximately 800,000 members.

Exhibit 1: Shredded plastic bag waste at the Prince George’s County Yard Waste Facility in 2013, before a ban on plastic yard waste bags was enforced

