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Education, Energy, and
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Chair, Joint Committee on
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THE SENATE OF MARYLAND
ANNAPOLIS, MARYLAND 21401

Testimony in Support of SB599 – On-Farm Organics and Wasted Food Reduction and Diversion Grant Programs – Established

February 20, 2026

Chair Feldman, Vice-Chair Kagan, and members of the Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee:

Thank you for your consideration of Senate Bill 599, which would establish three coordinated grant programs to build Maryland’s food waste reduction and organics diversion infrastructure.

Maryland is discarding enormous amounts of usable food and organic material each year, wasting resources, increasing greenhouse gas emissions, and placing avoidable strain on our landfills. In 2019, 66 million tons of wasted food were generated nationwide in the retail, food service, and residential sectors, and approximately 60% of that waste was sent to landfills. When food ends up in landfills, it decomposes and produces methane, a potent greenhouse gas that accelerates climate change.

In 2024, food represented about 19% of all Maryland waste at about 850,000 tons.¹ Each household loses around 216 meals annually.² Much of this food could have been used or composted rather than ending up in our waste stream.

The problem is not simply waste, it is a lack of infrastructure and investment. Many farms, businesses, counties, and nonprofit food rescue organizations lack the funding and logistical capacity to prevent, rescue, compost, or recycle wasted food. Strategic investment in food waste reduction would lower greenhouse gas emissions, conserve water, support farmers, and redirect edible food to Marylanders in need.

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<https://news.maryland.gov/mde/2025/04/07/maryland-department-of-the-environment-urges-consumers-to-make-sustainable-choices-for-food-waste-prevention-week/#:~:text=Wasted%20food%20is%20not%20just,average%20household%20approximately%20%242%2C880%20annually.>

² <https://deepcreektimes.com/maryland-households-lose-15th-most-in-food-waste-each-year/>

SB599 addresses this gap. The bill establishes three coordinated grant programs to build Maryland's food waste reduction and organics diversion infrastructure:

1. Wasted Food Reduction and Diversion Grant Program

Administered by the Maryland Department of Agriculture, this program supports projects, infrastructure, and education that reduce food waste, rescue edible food, compost or recycle food residuals, and help transition away from single-use food service ware.

2. On-Farm Organics Diversion and Recycling Grant Program

Administered by the Maryland Department of the Environment, this program supports on-farm food waste reduction and organics diversion efforts, including cold storage, food rescue partnerships, composting, compost application, and related infrastructure that helps farmers utilize organic materials productively.

3. County Wasted Food Reduction Block Grant Program

Administered by the Department of the Environment, in consultation with the department of Agriculture, this program provides block grant funding to all counties in proportion to population to reduce, rescue, and divert wasted food. Eligible recipients include local governments, educational institutions, nonprofit organizations, for-profit businesses, and farmers. Priority is given to projects that benefit local communities, serve overburdened or underserved communities, and follow best management practices.

Together, these programs fill longstanding gaps in Maryland's approach to organic waste management by creating a structured pathway for prevention, rescue, composting, and recycling.

Importantly, this year's version of SB599 does not have the tipping fee included in previous drafts. The bill does not prescribe a dedicated funding source. Instead, it directs the Maryland Department of the Environment and the Maryland Department of Agriculture to work collaboratively to seek and apply for available funding to support these grant programs.

SB599 represents a practical, forward-looking strategy that advances environmental stewardship, supports farmers, strengthens food systems, and reduces strain on our waste infrastructure, without imposing new fees. By promoting collaboration and positioning Maryland to compete for available funding, this bill will help reduce waste, lower emissions, and prevent billions of dollars in avoidable losses. For these reasons, I respectfully request a favorable report on SB599.

Sincerely,



Senator Katie Fry Hester
Howard and Montgomery Counties