

**Testimony of James Alston,
Westport Community Resident
In Favor of the
Removal of Incinerators from the Renewable Energy Portfolio
Standard
HB0438 SB0560
Before the
Economic Matters Committee

General Assembly of Maryland
February 20, 2020**

Chair Dereck E. Davis, Vice Chair Kathleen M. Damais, members of the House Economic Matters Committee and honored guests, thank you for the opportunity to testify before the Committee. My name is James Alston, a longtime resident of Westport, a community that houses one of Maryland's largest incinerators. Some of us here today are in a state of conflicting rationale as it relates to finding the nearly perfect balance to how we contribute to being more responsible for human welfare. Some of us have a clear vision for the future of environmental justice. In that light, I am grateful for the work of Delegate Mosby, Charkoudian, Shett, Robbyn Lewis, Jazz Lewis, Lierman, Smith, and others, in ways they are leading the charge toward that objective.

There is a particular balance between human welfare and human social engineering that must be addressed in order to manage the consequences that unfold as a result of people existing in a free capitalist society. The ways that we limit the collateral damage of those two dynamics are extremely important to our survival. Waste management has always been an element of society that has warranted our attention. As State legislators, I remind you that one of your primary roles, if not the most important role in which you serve, is to ensure that human welfare exist in our day to day lives. As a person who has lived and still lives in a community that has been historically surrounded by the presence of heavy industrial entities and environmental hazards, my testimony emanates from a mental and physical sphere of lived experiences and is directly related to the need to move from a less reticent voice for my community and illuminate a need for action; action that petitions my State legislators to move in a manner that demonstrates your capacity to care more about the outcomes of poor minority populations than some financial quibble.

HB438 and SB560 asks that our State legislators move toward removing waste-to-energy and refuse-derived fuel from eligibility for inclusion in the State's Renewable Energy Portfolio Standard (RPS) as a Tier 1 resource. For me, as a resident who lives less than a quarter mile from one of Maryland's largest incinerators and one who has seen the adverse effects of environmental hazards upon Westport residents, it means that you as law makers and me as a voice for my community, have now before us a chance to make a conscious decision to no longer subsidize the demise of a minority population and back away from continuously placing Westport residents in harms way. Legislators, you have an opportunity to forge the way toward moving in a different direction; one that harnesses a better approach to managing waste. The groundwork has been laid by the Energy Justice Network and its partners. The pathway to a more just and responsible society is clear if we consider all of the elements of the Pathway to Zero Waste 2020 Package.

What more evidence do you need to move in the direction of removing such an egregious legacy of subsidizing the work of incinerators and their lack of care for the communities that surround them? It is quite evident that there is a lack of care on their part as we witness an active scheme to hide the real story of how they are polluting our communities while attempting to avoid a push for consistent air monitoring. Would you need to read the plethora of studies identifying the many adverse health outcomes of communities

located in close proximity to waste-to-energy incinerators? Do you need to hear that, having lived in Westport under the fog of heavy industrial facilities, I had a father who died of cancer at the age of 58? Would you need to hear that I had a sister born with a rare form of cancer? Would you need to hear about neighbors who suffer from respiratory illnesses? Would you need to hear that I helped raise four nephews who all suffered from asthma? Would you need to hear that in the past year I volunteered to have a air monitoring system placed directly at my doorstep and found that particle matter measured almost doubled that of other areas of Baltimore City extending beyond Wheelabrator? Would you need to hear that some South Baltimore communities have successfully proved that recycling is a real possibility and not a foreign idea? Would you need to hear that our business community has begun to move toward more greener business solutions?

In conclusion, none of the bad things I elaborate upon in this testimony will morph into something less troublesome; and none of the good things I mention within this testimony will be allowed to flourish-- unless our legislators do the right thing. The residents of Maryland need our Economic Matters Committee and each member of the legislator to act responsibly in ways that propel the passage of HB438 and SB560. It is paramount to human welfare that we use our State's economic resources and legislative power to strengthen a more evolved and socially responsible waste management paradigm. The need is urgent as it paves way for a new Zero Waste economy and lessens the human despair that each of us will inevitably face if we ignore the real opportunity that is now before us.