



HB589 - Organics Recycling and Waste Diversion - Food Residuals Position: Favorable

Dear Chairman Barve, Vice Chair Stein and Members of the Committee,

I'm Rachel with the Sunrise Movement. I reside in District 45 in Baltimore City and am here to testify in support of HB 0539. I graduated from Towson University in 2018 with a bachelor of science in Environmental Science and minor in biology. The core of my studies being climate science, I learned about the processes involved in climate change, like the ability of air to trap more water as that air becomes warmer. I took courses in organic chemistry and wetland ecology, where I learned about nutrient elements essential for healthy soil, for instance nitrogen, phosphorus, potassium, calcium, sulfur, and magnesium. I also learned about the water and carbon storage capacity of different types of soils. Soil everywhere holds water, but the more organic matter found in soil, the healthier the soil, and the higher its capacity to store water and carbon. The climate crisis is real, global, existential, and now, it has become more obvious than ever before to Marylanders. The floods in Baltimore, Ellicott City, and the sunny day flooding on the Eastern Shore are all symptomatic of a climate crisis right here in our state of Maryland. As I mentioned before, I graduated in 2018. I still haven't found a job that I would be satisfied with accepting, so I clean houses for a living. One of the jobs I recently interviewed for was for Healthy Soils Program Coordinator for the Healthy Soils Program through the MDA. The program emerged from a bill passed in 2017 by Governor Hogan, in an effort to improve the health, yield, and profitability of soils. And also, to increase biological activity and carbon sequestration in agricultural soils. What better way is there to accomplish these goals than by naturally, with compost?

“A growing body of information demonstrates that healthy carbon-rich soils, landscapes, and aquatic systems are more capable of buffering climate extremes. Cities with carbon-rich water and nutrient-holding ecosystems will be more resilient to heat island impacts (like those faced by the city of Baltimore), flooding, air and water quality problems, and other environmental extremes that we can expect to occur with increasing frequency and intensity in the coming decades. Composting reduces GHG emissions. Compost added to the soil can draw CO₂ out of the atmosphere and enhance the soil's capacity to sequester/hold the carbon—especially in no-till situations, such as in orchards, vineyards, and grazing lands, where the soil is not disturbed in ways that would release the CO₂. Turning organic waste into a decarbonizing asset involves the mandatory collection and sorting of food waste, yard clippings, and other biodegradable waste from residences, businesses, and institutions (hospitals, schools, etc.) so that it is kept out of landfills where it would generate emissions. The organics are separated from the rest of the waste stream and recycled into carbon-capturing compost for sale to nearby farms and landscape use or bio-gas for industry.” - carbon neutral cities

It is important to recognize that the passage of this bill would incentivize educators to incorporate composting lessons and soil education components into their curriculums, if not already existent. These education programs will influence students and teachers to implement composting programs in their schools, whether the schools produce a ton of food waste or not. When younger students matriculate to higher institutions that do produce a ton of food waste and are required to compost, they will be well-informed on proper waste management practices and their benefits. HB 0539 would encourage more Marylanders to adhere to composting by turning it into what it should have always been: a normalized habit for a healthy society.

We must not ignore that one of the goals of this bill is also to reduce food waste; facilities will not make any attempt to do this until they are required to keep track of exactly how much food they are wasting. This newly added pressure will encourage institutions to recover or “rescue” food, and divert it to people who simply do not have it. In addition to reducing greenhouse gas emissions for our state, curbing hunger in Maryland is an excellent supplemental benefit of HB 0539.