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House Bill 589 - Solid Waste Management – Organics Recycling and Waste Diversion – Food Residuals

Position: Support

Dear Chair Barve, Vice Chair Stein, and members of the Environment and Transportation Committee:

Transformation of "organics" or "compostables" into compost or other valuable product is the inevitable direction that waste management is going in. Passage of HB 589 will show leadership and vision to waste producers and waste managers in the State of Maryland - and encourage the development of composting expertise and infrastructure, as well as compost related jobs.

I have a long time interest in waste management, as well as an interest in sustainable agriculture and urban farming. In 2015 I took an early retirement from the US Environmental Protection Agency after a career as an Environmental Scientist. After my retirement I started participating in community composting and the composting business through training and by attending US Composting Council and BioCycle Conferences. In 2018 I decided to put these interests together to form a consulting business called Onsite Compost Consulting.

During 2019 I was hired by the Virginia Department of Corrections as the compost expert for a USDA grant funded project to implement onsite composting at 18 prison farms throughout the State. At each prison I worked with staff to set up day to day food waste diversion and composting procedures. Each site was able to use static pile composting methods with a tractor or front end loader for moving piles. Food waste and other compostables are about 50% by weight of the total waste stream at these institutions. Daily food waste amounts vary from about 200 lbs/day to 2 tons/day. As a result of this program, a total of about 6 tons/day food waste is being composted onsite - avoiding hauling and avoiding landfill disposal of compostable material. The resulting compost will be used to build soils at these institutions and farms.

At each prison farm, dumpster size can be reduced and frequency of pick-up can be reduced - both of which result in significant and ongoing cost savings. As part of the program, Prison staff are trained as Compost Facility Operators and the composting expertise within the Virginia Department of Corrections is being developed.

There are many opportunities for implementing composting programs in the State of Maryland. Institutional onsite composting could be considered at prisons, universities, community colleges, and schools, and it may make sense at remotely located retreat centers and summer camps. Incorporating onsite treatment of compostable material will generally reduce truck traffic and use of fuel and labor for hauling, as well as creating a distributed network of composting sites and a wider labor force of composting experts.

HB 589 is a necessary step for promoting composting at institutions - whether it be for onsite composting or hauling to regional compost facilities.