HB 589 - Solid Waste Management - Organics Recycling and Waste Diversion - Food Residuals
Environment and Transportation Committee
February 19, 2020
Position: Favorable

Maryland PIRG's mission is to deliver persistent, result-oriented public interest activism that protects consumers, encourages a fair, sustainable economy, and fosters responsive, democratic government. We are a Baltimore based, statewide, non-partisan, non-profit, citizen-funded public interest advocacy organization with members across the state.

Environment Maryland is a citizen-based environmental advocacy organization. We work to protect clean air, clean water, and open space. We have thousands of members across the state and are based in Baltimore.

There is something beautiful about compost. It's a simple concept, it's tried and true.

- It offers a path to eliminate waste, and the troubles that come with mishandling organic waste - especially dirty air and water from incinerators and landfills.
- It helps fight climate change - putting that valuable carbon back into the environment in a good way, revitalizing soils and reducing the need for chemical fertilizers.

This summer, Maryland PIRG released a report Composting in America: A Path to Eliminate Waste, Revitalize Soil and Tackle Global Warming, which found that composting all organic waste - including food scraps and yard trimmings - could eliminate nearly one-third of all materials sent to landfills and trash incinerators across the United States.

One of the best practices we recommend in the report is setting up policies that require large commercial organic waste producers to divert waste from landfills and incinerators to composting facilities, which is what this bill will do. By gradually phasing in the largest

generators of organic waste, this bill focuses on waste streams that are easily compostable without putting any undue burden on Maryland businesses.

In addition to preventing new methane from entering our atmosphere, composting helps plants and microorganisms to thrive which then pulls carbon out of the atmosphere. One model in the Maryland PIRG report found that applying compost to 50 percent of California's land used for grazing could sequester the amount of carbon currently emitted by California's homes and businesses.[1]

Compost is a nutrient rich additive to soil that can take the place of unsustainable chemical fertilizers and pesticides. The use of chemical fertilizers is of particular concern to Maryland. Last year, the dead zone in the Bay was the largest it has ever been and we know that nutrient runoff is one major reason for this growth. Chemical fertilizers can fuel algal blooms, kill fish, and contaminate the water. Chemical fertilizers deplete soil long term and they produce nitrous oxide, a greenhouse gas that is up to 310 times as potent as carbon dioxide over a 100 year period. Continuing to rely on such a toxic alternative doesn't make any sense when we have the ability to create compost with waste we already create.

We urge you to vote favorably on HB 589.

[1] Ibid.