



THE MARYLAND HOUSE OF DELEGATES  
ANNAPOLIS, MARYLAND 21401

HB0589 - SOLID WASTE MANAGEMENT - ORGANICS RECYCLING AND WASTE  
DIVERSION - FOOD RESIDUALS

TESTIMONY OF DELEGATE LORIG CHARKOUDIAN  
FEBRUARY 19, 2020

Chair Barve, Vice Chair Stein, and Members of the Environment and Transportation Committee,

As our statewide effort to reduce emissions is under way, it is essential that our policy choices during this critical period reflect our multi-dimensional approach to addressing climate change and ensuring sustainability. One important aspect for this agenda should be a commitment by our state to seek out composting as one strategy for decreased emission output and further environmental protection.

One of the primary ways we can become more efficient in our composting strategy is by reducing food waste in Maryland. Over 25% of the overall food supply is inevitably wasted in retail businesses and at home, and this persistent problem has unfortunately become a national norm. When this waste ends up in incinerators and landfills, we lose out on several environmental and economic benefits that could be obtained through composting.

Composting is a wonderful alternative to this dilemma. By turning that deadweight organic material into a decomposed and nutrient-rich substance, we are able utilize that waste efficiently as a means for achieving our broader interconnected climate goals. One important function of composting is the significant decrease in emissions observed when food waste is diverted from landfills.

This legislation would require large-scale food waste generators within a 30 mile radius of organics recycling facilities to source-separate residuals. These recycling facilities need to have the capacity and willingness to accept the organic material for processing. We also strive to give waste generators flexible options in order to achieve the goals we've set. For example, instead of sending food waste to organic recycling facilities, generators could implement their own methods of reducing waste, such as self-management onsite, agricultural usage, or through donations.

Composting has the added environmental benefit of improved soil quality. Soil depletion and polluting is an enormous problem for residents across the state, but composting represents an efficient solution. When compost is mixed into soil, it increases the carbon and other nutrients available to be absorbed by the surrounding plant life. This has even been shown to reduce urban storm water pollutants by 60-95%.

We also should not forget the potential economic benefits of an increased commitment to composting in Maryland. In a 2013 study, the Institute for Local Self Reliance found that increasing composting programs in our state could support nearly 1,400 new full-time jobs<sup>1</sup>. This increase in the labor supply will benefit already existing composting facilities, in addition to supporting new ones. Moreover, supporting this legislation will increase the return on the investment that many local businesses have already made to compost for the sake of sustainability, and will provide an incentive for more investment by other businesses to do the same. An expanding industry for organic material disposal could make an incredible impact in the aggregate.

We've seen the positive impact of organic waste bans in other states that have experimented with similar policies. In 2014, Massachusetts made it illegal to dispose of a certain amount of generated commercial organic waste. By 2017, the state's Environmental Protection agency found the quantity of organic waste collected nearly three times the baseline amount. Additionally, the state garnered \$175 million in economic activity in that short period of time.

Implementing a food waste reduction program gives Marylanders the rare opportunity to benefit from the positive externalities that are associated with a green economy. Encouraging composting in businesses and other institutions will facilitate a multitude of economic and environmental benefits. These benefits will translate into new jobs, enhanced green infrastructure, healthier soil, improved food systems, and reduced emissions.

I respectfully request a favorable report of this legislation.

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<sup>1</sup> Platt, Brenda, Bell, Bobby, and Cameron Harsh. "Pay Dirt: Composting in Maryland to Reduce Waste, Create Jobs, and Protect the Bay." May 2013. Institute for Local Self-Reliance. <https://ilsr.org/paydirt/>