

Testimony Supporting HB438 & SB560

House Economic Matters Committee | Senate Finance Committee

February 20, 2020 | February 25, 2020

Position: Support

As 33 Maryland-based organizations working to support the health, environmental wellness, economic well being, and climate resiliency of Maryland communities, we urge you to vote yes on HB438/SB560 and end the practice of subsidizing trash incineration as “clean energy” under Maryland’s Renewable Portfolio Standard. Burning trash cannot be considered clean energy, and Maryland ratepayers can no longer be required to subsidize facilities that pollute their communities. Transitioning to truly renewable energy and alternative methods of waste disposal will create more jobs in Maryland, and this is a transition that our communities are ready to make.

Trash Incineration Harms the Climate and Does Not Meet the Goals of the RPS Program

When incinerators burn trash, they emit more greenhouse gasses per unit of energy generated than even coal, the dirtiest of fossil fuels. In 2015, the Wheelabrator Baltimore incinerator emitted roughly double the amount of greenhouses gases per unit of energy produced, on average, by each of the 7 coal plants located in Maryland. The Dickerson trash incinerator in Montgomery County produces 500,000 tons of greenhouse gases that contribute to climate change. Climate change poses multiple threats to Maryland residents, including increased precipitation, more frequent and severe flooding, and rising summer temperatures that increase outdoor air pollution levels. The financial support that Maryland’s Renewable Portfolio Standard provides must be used to support the development of new renewable energy projects that will help Maryland face and fight climate change, not to prop up aging trash incinerators.

Maryland’s Renewable Portfolio Standard (RPS) was enacted in 2004 to facilitate a gradual transition to renewable sources of energy. Because of its impact on public health and on climate change, trash incineration cannot be considered renewable energy. According to the Department of Legislative Services’ analysis of this legislation, about 10% of Renewable Energy Credits in 2017 were from trash incineration. If applied to other Tier 1 renewable energy sources instead of incineration, these credits would support new high-paying Maryland jobs, increase GDP due to construction of new Maryland-based renewable energy infrastructure, and reduce Maryland’s carbon emissions.

Trash Incineration Harms our Health

Trash incineration contributes to the air pollution in Maryland that causes chronic illnesses among Maryland residents. To produce the same amount of energy, Maryland's trash incinerators emit higher levels of mercury, lead, nitrogen oxides (NOx), carbon monoxide (CO), and carbon dioxide (CO₂) than Maryland's coal plants.[2] The process of incinerating trash creates an especially dangerous set of compounds called dioxins, declared by the World Health Organization as a known human carcinogen; dioxins are also linked to diseases of the immune system, endocrine system, nervous system, and reproductive system.¹

Air pollution is an enormous problem in Baltimore City, surrounding the BRESCO trash incinerator: according to an Environmental Integrity Project report, the average rate of asthma-related hospitalizations in Baltimore City is approximately twice the average rate of Maryland and three times the average rate of the United States. Even worse, there is a distinct association between asthma hospitalization in Baltimore city and median household income. The Baltimore area has long been classified as the U.S. EPA as failing to meet federal ozone standards. The BRESCO trash incinerator contributes to this problem, emitting over 1,000 tons of NOx pollution annually. NOx also contributes to the formation of fine particles, a pollutant that has been associated in studies with premature death from heart and lung disease, and is a serious trigger of asthma attacks. According to a Chesapeake Bay Foundation commissioned study, fine particulate matter emitted from the Wheelabrator Baltimore "waste-to-energy facility" causes over \$55 million in adverse health effects annually.

The Montgomery County Resource Recovery Facility is the second largest air polluter located in Montgomery County. This facility produces approximately 740 tons of air pollutants and sends 180,000 tons of toxic ash to landfills in Virginia. Air pollutants from waste incinerators have also shown to increase the risk of pre-term births, and lung and blood cancers. An Environmental Integrity Project assessment shows that the Montgomery County and Baltimore City incinerators emit higher levels of mercury, lead, nitrogen oxides (NOx), carbon monoxide (CO), and carbon dioxide (CO₂) than coal plants. In Baltimore, Montgomery County, and throughout the state of Maryland, trash incineration contributes to air pollution that harms residents' health; those residents should not be required to subsidize this pollution through the Renewable Portfolio Standard.

Alternatives to Trash Incineration Create More Local Jobs

Truly clean, renewable energy creates jobs in Maryland. The State has more than 218 solar companies and over 5,400 solar jobs. The wind industry has brought more than \$380 million in private investment into Maryland's economy, to date. These jobs in clean

¹ <https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/dioxins-and-their-effects-on-human-health>

renewable energy lead to good-paying careers within these industries and across related economic sectors. New clean energy development made possible by removing “waste-to-energy” incineration from the RPS, and therefore making credits available to other Tier 1 energy sources, will further support the development of these economic sectors in Maryland.

Likewise, other methods of waste management such as composting, recycling, and reusing materials create more local jobs than trash incineration. According to the Institute for Local Self-Reliance, per ton of waste processed in Maryland, composting already “employs two times more workers than landfilling, and four times more workers than incineration. On a per-capital-investment basis, for every \$10 million invested, composting facilities in Maryland support twice as many jobs as landfills and 17 more jobs than incinerators.” A similar study projected that within three years of increased recycling rates, “Baltimore could have 500 new direct jobs in this sector of the city’s economy;” overall, recycling and composting yield five to ten times more jobs than trash incineration. Likewise, for every 10,000 tons of materials that are managed through reuse programs, 75 to 250 jobs are created. If investments were focused on more environmentally-friendly methods of waste disposal, more jobs would be created in Maryland.

We Do Not Need RPS Subsidies to Deal with Trash

Renewable Portfolio Standard subsidies to trash incinerators are not necessary to process Maryland’s trash. Trash incineration was added to Tier 1 of the RPS in 2011, decades after Maryland’s two incinerators were built. Before 2011, it had been classified as a Tier 2 source, receiving lower subsidies that were to be phased out by 2019. Thanks to that reclassification in 2011, trash incinerator companies have enjoyed almost a decade of higher subsidies at the expense of Maryland ratepayers, subsidies that will continue in perpetuity without legislative action. But this does not need to be a permanent fixture of Maryland’s energy market. These renewable energy credits are intended to support clean, renewable energy, but when Maryland ratepayers’ money goes toward Renewable Energy Credits to trash incinerator companies, they do not receive actually clean, renewable energy in return. Taking trash incineration out of tier one is not a bait and switch, merely no longer paying these facilities for a product they do not provide.

Removing trash incineration from Tier 1 of the Renewable Portfolio Standard does not necessarily force Maryland’s trash incinerators to close, but allowing trash incineration to keep receiving subsidies as renewable energy is in direct opposition to grassroots efforts to move away from trash incineration and toward zero waste overall. As the only municipalities in Maryland that contain trash incinerators, Baltimore City and Montgomery County are working actively to increase recycling and composting rates and transition away from trash incineration. In April 2017, the Baltimore City Council passed a resolution calling for Baltimore to “develop an effective, long-term, plan to move toward Zero Waste to

support the continued health, well-being, and prosperity of our residents.” Then in January 2019, the City Council passed a resolution calling on the General Assembly to remove trash incineration from the RPS. The City Council and Mayor have repeatedly demonstrated their commitment to transition away from BRESKO and toward a zero waste future. However, days after the legislative session ended in 2019, Wheelabrator filed suit against Baltimore City to stop the Clean Air Ordinance that many thought would shut down BRESKO. Wheelabrator has also sued Baltimore County for reducing the volume of waste it sent to be incinerated. Meanwhile, Montgomery County Executive Mark Elrich pledged repeatedly during his campaign that if elected, he would close the Dickerson trash incinerator by 2022; however, just before he took office, the county’s contract with Covanta to operate the incinerator was extended through 2026. Continued state subsidies to trash incineration harm efforts to transition away from trash incineration toward zero waste practices like composting, source reduction, and reuse. Baltimore’s 2019 Sustainability Plan includes the goal of diverting 90% of the city’s waste from incinerators and landfills, and this is an achievable goal. According to the Baltimore Office of Sustainability’s 2014 report, “Waste to Wealth: Baltimore Waste Stream Analysis,” 82% of Baltimore’s household materials could be recycled or composted. Likewise, Montgomery County has a goal of increasing its waste diversion rate - already very high - to 70% by this year.

Other Maryland communities are actively pursuing robust composting, recycling, and repurposing programs with the goal of reducing waste. Frederick and Carroll Counties, since rejecting the construction of a new incinerator in 2014, have made significant strides toward zero waste. In Carroll County, New Windsor piloted a “pay as you throw” program last year that resulted in a 44% decrease in solid waste thrown away. When it decided not to build its new incinerator, Frederick County created a “What’s Next” Steering Committee to investigate alternatives to the rejected trash incinerator. In the words of one committee member, “the legislative, budgetary, and regulatory gears are moving Frederick County toward pilot programs and public education, and ultimately to a robust diversion of organics from landfilling, with the added tremendous benefits of producing compost from the organics to amend our soil on farms and elsewhere.” County schools are participating in composting and diversion programs that keep up to 87%. Prince George’s County hosts the East Coast’s largest composting facility and boasts the highest waste diversion rate in the state. Communities across Maryland are working actively to develop the recycling, composting, reuse, and reduction programs to manage waste streams in ways that are less polluting and more cost-effective than trash incineration. It’s time for the state of Maryland to stop subsidizing facilities that make it harder to reach that goal.

Conclusion

All Marylanders have the right to breathe clean air and no one should suffer health and environmental challenges because of where they live. The state should not subsidize incineration as clean and renewable energy, making it more profitable to pollute our

communities and environment. We strongly urge the passage of this legislation to stop the practice of paying trash incinerators to for clean energy as they pollute our communities and environment.

Sincerely,

Clean Water Action
Multi-Faith Alliance of Climate Stewards - Frederick County
Sunrise Movement Baltimore
Runners4Justice
Turner Station Conservation Teams, Inc.
Filbert Street Garden
Takoma Park Mobilization Environment Committee
Baltimore Free Farm
Echotopia LLC
Baltimore Community ToolBank
CCAN Action Fund
Sunrise Movement Howard County
Sugarloaf Citizens Association
Go Green OC
Maryland Legislative Coalition
Maryland WISE Women
Greenbelt Climate Action Network
Cedar Lane Unitarian Universalist Church Environmental Justice Ministry
Unitarian Universalist Legislative Ministry of Maryland
Maryland League of Conservation Voters
Nuclear Information and Resource Service
Maryland Legislative Coalition
Indivisible Towson
Earth Forum of Howard County
Waterkeepers Chesapeake
Mountainside Education and Enrichment
Maryland Public Health Association
MOM's Organic Market
Blue Water Baltimore
IndivisibleHoCoMD
Key City Compost
Maryland Conservation Council
Food & Water Action

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