



## **HB807: Task Force on Recycling Policy and Recycling and Waste Systems in Maryland**

Senate Education, Health, and Environmental Affairs

March 31, 2021

### **Positon: Favorable**

Dear Chairman Pinsky and Members of the Committee,

HB807 is a comprehensive view on Maryland’s current recycling policy and our recycling and waste systems in Maryland. We applaud the comprehensive and regional approach used in the task force. Changing the way we manage our waste is a critical part of fighting climate change, despite the common conception that climate action is primarily about what transportation systems we use or how we get our energy. Plastic is made out of petroleum, and as fuel demand decreases major oil companies are increasing their plastic production; reducing plastic use is a key part of reducing fossil fuel use.<sup>1</sup> Landfills and trash incinerators, two common methods for disposing of our waste, also are greenhouse gas producers - in landfills when organic waste rots, and in incinerators as organic waste and plastics (essentially fossil fuels) are burned.

As it stands, it is difficult for members of the public to know where their recyclable materials go. Producing a comprehensive study of this will help raise public understanding, especially of the difficulties of recycling plastic. Many of the plastics we use are not recyclable, and even which ones can be recycled varies across different jurisdictions. The presence of the triangle with arrows does not mean that the item can be tossed into the blue bin. The more people toss unrecyclable materials into the recycling bin, the more expensive and unsustainable our recycling programs are. This task force’s report may help give members of the public a better understanding of the realities of recycling markets, and drive environmental action.

One exciting feature of Maryland’s recycling program as it pertains to this bill is that compost counts as organic recycling. Composting is an underutilized waste management program that can save money for local governments and has the added climate benefit of sequestering carbon, the added stormwater benefit of increasing storage capacity of amended soils, and the added economic benefit of creating accessible, local, green jobs. However, it can

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<sup>1</sup> Gardiner, Beth. “The Plastics Pipeline: A Surge of New Production Is on the Way.” 2019, Dec. 19. Yale Environment 360. <https://e360.yale.edu/features/the-plastics-pipeline-a-surge-of-new-production-is-on-the-way>

be difficult to find places to site compost facilities. The Yard Waste, Food Residuals, and Other Organic Materials Diversion and Infrastructure Study Group, as required by HB171 (2017), included a recommendation to inventory state land to find suitable locations for compost facilities in their final July 2019 report. Unfortunately, the state never completed that inventory, and proposed facilities outside of farmland have faced challenges getting off the ground. HB807 includes a look at potential facility sites, especially those that have been abandoned, which will be a valuable step forward in increasing Maryland's compost capacity.

We also applaud the recommendations to advance the principles of zero waste; it is important to note that zero waste does not properly include burning materials. Recently the plastic industry has been abuzz about "chemical recycling." While some chemical recycling processes to turn plastic into other types of plastic do exist and may be under development, the more prevalent form of chemical recycling is turning the plastic into a fuel feedstock. Turning petroleum into plastic and then back into fuel to be burned is not recycling - it's just burning petroleum with more steps in between. We hope the Task Force will use the peer-reviewed, internationally-recognized definition of Zero Waste given by the Zero Waste International Alliance,<sup>2</sup> and exclude burning technologies from its recommendations.

We are pleased to see that the MD-DC Composting Committee, an affiliate of the US Composting Council, is on the task force, as is Trash Free Maryland, Environment Maryland, and the Sierra Club. The Sierra Club's Zero Waste Committee has significant experience with zero waste principles around the state, from plastics to compost.

Finally, we also appreciate that the legislation moved the "due date" for the report back to July 1, 2022. This will give the task force more time to complete the work thoroughly. Our waste system is complicated, but we can reform it to improve its sustainability and accountability, so we know what happens when we throw our waste into the blue (or other) bin.

Thank you and we urge a favorable report.

Best,

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<sup>2</sup> <https://zwia.org/policies/>