



January 25th, 2021

Testimony on HB0264/SB0483

***Solid Waste Management - Organics Recycling and Waste Diversion - Food Residuals
Environment and Transportation Committee***

Position: Favorable

Organization: Sunrise Movement Baltimore

Submitting: Stephen J Leas

My name is Stephen Leas, a resident of Charles Village in Baltimore. I am writing as a member of Sunrise Movement, a youth led movement fighting the climate crisis. This testimony represents my support for HB0264/SB0483, the Organics Recycling and Waste Diversion Act, a bill that our local hub Sunrise Movement Baltimore has endorsed.

Food waste produces methane, a very potent greenhouse gas that contributes to the climate crisis. Methane is 84 times more potent a greenhouse gas than CO₂.¹ The USDA estimates that 30-40% of our food supply is wasted at a retail and consumer level.² That is a lot of waste! This food waste is the single largest source of waste in landfills and incinerators and the third largest source of methane in landfills in the US according to the EPA,³ not to mention how the invaluable environmental and labor resources continue to be wasted to grow and transport this soon-to-be-wasted food.

The first easy solution to this problem is to combat food waste and feed our communities. Businesses and organizations should donate their extra food to help those fighting food insecurity. In the US, 1 in 9 people and 1 in 6 children struggle with hunger, and in 2018 11% of Marylanders struggled with food insecurity.⁴ That number has only grown with the pandemic.

Second, food that cannot be donated should be composted for communities to reap its innumerable benefits. Compost nourishes our soil to grow more food and plants, reduces and/or eliminates the need for toxic pesticides and herbicides, improves water retention, and even sequesters carbon from our atmosphere. It can be used in habitat and wetlands revitalization and to improve contaminated and marginal soils.

¹ <https://mde.state.md.us/programs/Air/ClimateChange/MCCC/MWG/MWGMDEPres02242017.pdf>

² <https://www.usda.gov/foodlossandwaste/why>

³ Ibid.

⁴ <https://www.feedingamerica.org/hunger-in-america/maryland>



In Baltimore and throughout Maryland, compost can be used for community gardens and farms to grow local food and combat food insecurity. Urban and suburban farming also helps to fight the more extremes of the urban heat island effect and frequent flooding our cities endure due to climate change. There are plenty of benefits to compost use in our own communities.

Compost and food recovery would provide many full-time jobs in our communities. According to the Institute for Local Self-Reliance, composting would create twice as many jobs as landfills.⁵ This bill will provide economic benefits to new and existing composting facilities and those working in soil remediation. We must grow green jobs to move Maryland forward!

Another important aspect of composting is that it diverts waste from incineration. Composting is part of a zero-waste strategy to end the \$55 million worth of respiratory damage my city faces each year due to trash incineration.

The Organic Recycling and Waste Diversion Bill will not only help Maryland fight climate change by reducing emissions, food waste, and improving soil health, but help feed food-insecure Marylanders and provide green jobs in our communities.

We encourage a FAVORABLE report for this important legislation.

Stephen Leas

⁵<https://mde.maryland.gov/programs/LAND/RecyclingandOperationsprogram/Documents/Fact%20Sheet%20-%20Composting%20in%20Maryland.pdf>