



7338 Baltimore Ave
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Committee: Finance

Testimony on: SB549 “Renewable Energy Portfolio Standard – Thermal Biomass Systems”

Position: Oppose

Hearing Date: February 23, 2021

The Maryland Sierra Club requests an unfavorable report on SB549, which seeks to amend the state’s Renewable Portfolio Standard (RPS) in a manner which is inconsistent with the efforts of this Committee and the Senate as a whole to better focus the RPS on supporting the development of new, clean renewable energy sources.

Specifically, this bill would alter the manner in which thermal biomass systems may qualify for renewable energy credits (RECs). Currently, RECs are allowed for thermal systems which primarily produce heat and energy from the disposal of poultry litter or other animal manure. The bill would eliminate this focus requirement, and allow RECs for thermal systems which instead primarily or entirely rely on other biomass, including the burning of trees.

The RPS is among our state’s most important programs for substantially reducing our emissions of climate-disrupting greenhouse gases. The RPS’ increased importance under the 2019 Clean Energy Jobs Act means it should be focused on incentivizing new, renewable energy facilities which will support Maryland’s efforts to mitigate climate change.

To that end, the Senate recently passed this session – with the support of this Committee – SB65 to remove black liquor from the RPS. Burning black liquor emits climate-disrupting CO₂ and other pollutants, including sulfur dioxide, arsenic, and lead which cause serious damage to our residents’ health. Removing black liquor from the RPS will lead to greater RPS support for clean renewable energy.

Expanding RPS incentives for burning trees, as this bill would do, would move the RPS in the other direction, i.e., the wrong direction. Burning trees emits a significant amount of CO₂ and other pollutants. Though the natural life-cycle of trees includes CO₂ emissions when trees die and decompose, this occurs slowly in a decades-long process that does not harm the climate or emit pollutants in the same manner or to the same degree.

For these reasons, we request an unfavorable report on SB549.

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Founded in 1892, the Sierra Club is America’s oldest and largest grassroots environmental organization. The Maryland Chapter has over 75,000 members and supporters, and the Sierra Club nationwide has over 800,000 members and nearly four million supporters.