

SB124 / HB150 - SUPPORT

Joseph Richardson

Mountainside Education and Enrichment/Lunch Out of Landfills

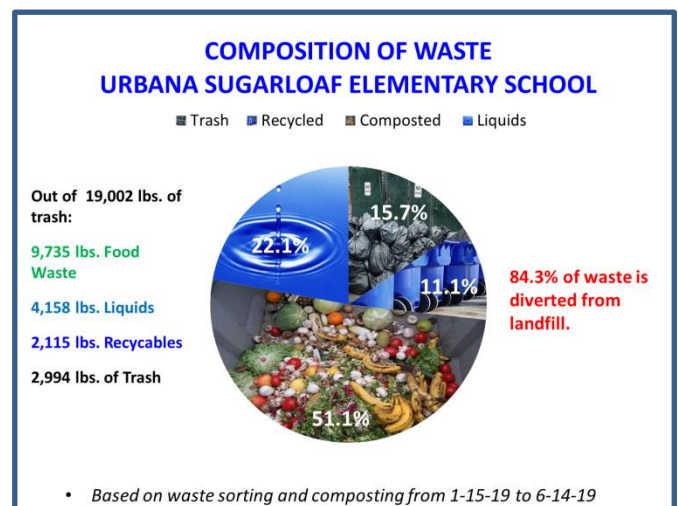
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Dear Senator Hettleman, Chairman Pinsky and members of the Health, Education and Environmental Affairs committee,

My name is Joseph Richardson; as the founder of Mountainside Education and Enrichment (MEE) and its Lunch Out of Landfills (LOOL) program, I am writing in support of SB124. MEE teaches, demonstrates, and engages all ages in scientific explorations and environmental sustainability. LOOL mobilizes K-12 students as "Solutionists" addressing our planet's climate emergency by reducing food waste in Maryland schools through daily meal waste sorting, weighing, and data tracking. Liquids are separated and disposed; recycling contamination is eliminated, food waste is picked up and composted, and unopened whole foods and liquids are recovered and redistributed to organizations serving food insecure households.

With temporary financial support from Rotary Clubs, LOOL was launched in January 2019 and before the COVID 19 pandemic struck, it had expanded to 18 schools in Frederick and Montgomery Counties. In participating Frederick County schools, 70 - 87 percent of daily lunch waste weight was diverted from landfill disposal. See example from one school below.

In the fall of 2021, Lunch out of Landfills partnered with several student-led organizations: Compostology founded by two students from Richard Montgomery; The Committee to Reimagine School Waste where three students from Bethesda Chevy Chase High School secured a \$48,000 World Wildlife Fund grant; and Rotary Interact students from Oakdale and Urbana High Schools. Together we have been navigating through the OMICRON variant and have met with resistance from school administration that understandably are reluctant to introduce new programs their schools. Despite these difficulties we have managed to launch programs in 9 schools and have 12 more schools preparing to commence programs this February.



The following findings, data, and trends from LOOL programs and schools demonstrate the need for SB 124 to financially support and expand student-led programs in schools across Maryland as soon as possible to reduce and compost school waste, improve recycling, recover whole foods and beverages,

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address food insecurity, and reduce climate-damaging methane emissions and other air pollutants from landfills and incinerators:

- The need to recover uneaten food to feed food distressed communities has never been greater and the food going into waste has never been greater.
 - Based on waste sorts, it is estimated that 355,000 whole piece of fruit are discarded each year just in Frederick County elementary and middle schools.
 - A 38 day food recovery program at Lincoln Elementary sent 2,508 unopened milks, 1,000+ fresh fruits, and 700 prepackaged food items to the Frederick Rescue Mission. In a 180 day school year, more than 11,000 milks could have been recovered.
- Many schools have abandoned attempts at recycling and 100% of cafeteria waste becomes trash.
- We have documented a 200% increase in the amount of organics going into the waste stream; 20 to 25% of cafeteria waste is liquids. Landfills are the third-largest source of human-related methane emissions in the United States, accounting for approximately 15.1 percent of these emissions in 2019 ([EPA source](#)). Landfilled liquids and organics contribute significantly to this.
- All students are now eligible for free lunches and fewer students bring lunch from home.
- Students stand in long lines at the cafeteria and have much less time to eat their lunches resulting in greater amounts of food waste.
- Students are mandated by the Federal Government to receive food they do not want and do not eat, most notably at breakfast.
- The need for a uniform policy regarding Share tables must be established and with COVID concerns, share tables have been eliminated.
- A network of volunteers, and personnel to coordinate them, will be needed to recover and redistribute uneaten perishable food safely on a daily basis and organizations that can take the food need to be identified and engaged.

I urge a favorable report on SB124.

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