

SB124 - SUPPORT

Advika Agarwal

Compostology of the Maryland Coalition to Re-Imagine School Waste

advika.agarw@gmail.com 240-308-5550

Education Health and Environmental Affairs Committee

Wednesday, January 19, 2022

Dear Chair Pinsky and Members of the Education, Health and Environmental Affairs Committee:

I am writing to express my support for SB0124, sponsored by Senator Hettleman, which will create a grant program supporting food waste reduction in schools.

In 2018, when I was in 7th grade, a few friends and I began a food scrap collection program at Clarksburg Elementary School. During lunchtime, students disposed of leftover food and certain paper waste in green bins separate from the trash and recycling cans. On average, **we diverted 880 pounds of food waste each month from a school of just 530 students**. In 6 months, we had collected roughly **10 pounds per child** - that would have otherwise ended up in incinerators and contributed heavily to our state's greenhouse gas emissions. The program is still running today.

The program cultivated a school culture change and helped CES get recertified as a MD Green School. The elementary schoolers were excited to now have an opportunity to make a tangible environmental impact on issues they had learned about in their classes. The principal and paraeducators could see new conversations emerge in the lunchroom about eco-friendliness and what else they could do to help.

Since 2018, my partner and I have been able to work in a Coalition to receive a \$48K grant from the World Wildlife Fund to begin 8 more programs this year.

Especially compared to their shocking scale of impact, these programs are simple, requiring little to no additional work from school admin and building services. However, the process of getting them started requires honest dedication and a time commitment that, realistically, only students are able to invest. It has taken months of collaborating with a variety of MCPS officials and raising funds to get close to starting these 8 programs. Our success is largely owed to the continued involvement of Mr. John Meyer and Ms. Lynne Zarate of the MCPS Division of Solid Waste Services. But Montgomery County is one of the few Maryland counties that has enough sustainability/waste management staffing and resources to support new endeavors like ours.

Based on our experiences in starting a new program entirely from scratch, we know that Senator Hettleman's grant program will not only make it plausible but also encourage schoolteachers, principals, nonprofit leaders, and more students like us to initiate creative programs which divert waste, teach long-lasting habits, and create new opportunities for elementary and secondary students.

I urge a favorable report on SB124 and I thank you for your commitment to ensuring we are doing everything we can to combat greenhouse gas emissions and expand environmental education to build the next generation of environmental stewards.

Sincerely,
Advika Agarwal