

SB124 - SUPPORT

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Compostology of the Maryland Coalition to Re-Imagine School Waste

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Education Health and Environmental Affairs Committee

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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.

Ever since I was a first-grader at Clarksburg Elementary School, I have been shocked and appalled by the insurmountable mountains of food waste that was produced each lunch in the cafeteria. My friends at the table would casually leave half a banana or the ends of bread pieces uneaten, and then dump it all into the big black garbage bins at the end. Throughout elementary school, I knew based on some of our science projects that climate change was bad, but I couldn't reconcile this knowledge with the fact that so much food was going straight to landfills each day. What was even more confusing for me was that I had friends that were FARMS students, meaning that they received free and reduced-price meals from our elementary school. However, with every unopened carrot packet or chip bag that went in the garbage bin, I couldn't understand why our schools did not have a system to give it to these low-income students instead.

Based on the experiences of my childhood and the tens of thousands of other students in Montgomery County that have been forced to reckon with this contradiction, my classmate Advika and I started a student-led organization called Compostology. Not only do we advocate for schools' food waste to be diverted from the trash to composting facilities, but we focus on food recovery as a whole. This isn't just an environmental problem — it's a human problem.

From our experiences starting food recovery programs at four elementary and middle schools, we have found that students are looking for hands-on opportunities to make a change in this world. Our school system has repeatedly told its students over the years that they are going to be the generation that will change the world, but our students are currently relegated to only hearing of problems such as climate change and food insecurity in the classroom.

SB0124 will increase equity by giving grants for food waste recovery programs to low-income schools that would have never had access otherwise. Making environmental change has been confined to well-funded schools for too long, but these grants *will* change that. It gives students not only a voice in their system, but the power to commit to daily habits that build up to something greater than themselves — something that will improve the lives of their classmates around them, and the world as a whole around them. When we started a food recovery program at Clarksburg Elementary School, the most impactful part of it was just seeing the students fully comprehend for the first time how much food

waste they produced. But even more than that, the students got to understand how food recovery programs could be an extremely strong solution for it.

For all of these reasons and many more, please support SB0124 and support a transition toward composting in Maryland. Thank you.

Sincerely,
Angelina Xu