



**Testimony IN SUPPORT WITH AMENDMENTS of SB229- Environment – On-Farm Composting Facilities – Permit Exemption**  
Education, Health, and Environmental Affairs Committee

January 25, 2022

Dear Chairman Pinsky and Members of the Committee,

Thank you for this opportunity to submit testimony in **SUPPORT WITH AMENDMENTS of SB229** on behalf of ShoreRivers. ShoreRivers is a river protection group on Maryland's Eastern Shore with 3,500 members. Our mission is to protect and restore our Eastern Shore waterways through science-based advocacy, restoration, and education.

ShoreRivers supports composting for the number of undeniable benefits that it provides, including the recycling of organic material, the natural approach to addressing solid waste concerns and the environmental impacts from landfills, and the use of the end composted product as a means of increasing soil absorption and as a natural alternative to synthetic fertilizers. We also support composting as an alternative means of managing poultry manure. However, we have concerns with incentivizing this industry to grow, without adequate oversight, and to the point where it could become a source of nutrient pollution and a threat to local water quality.

This bill increases the size a composting operation can be from 5,000 sq. ft. to 40,000 sq. ft. (0.9 acres) while being exempt from needing a composting permit from Maryland Department of the Environment. We also understand that the intention of the bill is to exempt only those farmers who are re-applying finished composted material on fields that they own, and not selling the product.

As we understand the bill, composting operations will be allowed to receive and store more material but without oversight to make sure it's handled properly. Handling the raw (pre-composted) product is important because if it's improperly stored and too much organic material gets into a local waterway it'll increase the Biological Oxygen Demand (BOD), also known as how much oxygen that organic material takes out of the water to decompose, taking the necessary oxygen away from other aquatic life. **To safely manage the storage of the raw product the landowner should follow an approved Agricultural Waste Management System Plan to clearly state how and where the raw material is to be safely stored, and record-keeping of the quantity and source of material received. In addition, the landowner must follow an approved Water Quality Conservation Plan that identifies the best management practices in place to prevent the raw material from entering local streams and waterways.**

We also understand that the sponsor may be considering amendments that require material that's brought to the farm to begin being composted within 24-hours, however, **without required record-keeping this requirement is not enforceable.** And secondly, the **bill will need to better define what it means to begin being composted**, as a pile of raw material placed on the ground could be considered to have begun being composted.

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Our final concern is how this bill will increase the unregulated production of compost while also incentivizing the increased application of composted material on farms without verifying that the farm can accept the additional nutrients and that the material isn't being overapplied. There's no secret that the over application of organic material on the Eastern Shore, particularly poultry waste, has caused impairments to the local waterways. We're concerned that with this bill that an increasing number of landowners will be producing more compost than they can safely apply, which might lead to them certifying their product with the state and selling it or mishandling and overapplying the material. **To provide better oversight, transparency, and accountability of the nutrients in the finished product, we feel that a landowner applying compost under this bill should be required to have their Nutrient Management Plan (NMP) on file with MDE.**

For these reasons stated above, ShoreRivers asks the Committee to adopt a **favorable report that includes these necessary amendments** on **SB229**.

Sincerely,



**Matt Pluta**

Choptank Riverkeeper , on behalf of:

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**ShoreRivers**

Isabel Hardesty, Executive Director

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