

SB124 / HB150 - SUPPORT

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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 a senior from Bethesda-Chevy Chase High School and a member of the student-driven Coalition to Re-Imagine School Waste, with partners from other high schools as well as Montgomery County Public Schools. We strongly believe that SB124/HB150 (Public Schools – Grant Program to Reduce and Compost School Waste) must be supported by your committee.

I have witnessed, for years, the frequent occurrence of students barely touching their lunches. Their uneaten apples, unopened milk bottles, and nibbled-on sandwiches pile up in school trash cans, creating a mountain of organic waste. I sought to do something about this. For the past couple of years, two peers and I have worked towards the goal of bringing composting to all public schools in Montgomery County. Even though the county wouldn't fund school compost programs, we felt an obligation to try and get schools to compost independently.

This obligation stems from one of the biggest problems of my generation- the climate crisis. Composting, which allows organic waste to decompose naturally instead of releasing greenhouse gases, is an effective way to address this crisis. As a student, I believe we must compost now- we must do anything we can do now- because if we don't act immediately the climate crisis will worsen.

In our efforts to get public schools to begin composting, the biggest obstacle was cost. Although they certainly wanted to begin composting, many under-resourced schools could not use a large portion of their PTA's budget to fund a compost program. My student group was ready to help educate the students, staff and parents about composting, facilitate communication with the compost "haulers," and oversee the roll out of the program. But, if schools don't have the means to begin composting, groups of passionate students (that lack resources) like my own organization are not able to function. This bill must pass because it will eliminate the most crucial obstacle preventing schools from starting composting programs and student groups like my own from inspiring a new generation of environmentalists.

From the waste sorts we've done with local elementary schools, we've found that over 85-90% of the waste we throw away in schools could be diverted away from dangerous landfills and incinerators. About 60% of the things kids throw away at school is food, milk or juice. In Maryland almost a million tons of food waste is generated each year with only 15.5% of these scraps being diverted. We must and we CAN do a better job. PLUS, the soil created from composted food is nutrient rich for our farms, and it actually captures carbon and methane – thereby reducing the dangerous greenhouse gases otherwise created in landfills and by incinerators.

By creating composting programs in schools, we can also salvage and share unused/uneaten foods and offer those foods to the hungry.

I urge you to vote favorably for SB124.