



Maryland Chapter
P.O Box 278
Riverdale, MD 20738

Committee: Environment and Transportation

Testimony on: HB 217 – “Task Force on Recycling Policy and Recycling and Waste Systems in Maryland

Position: Support

Hearing Date: February 2, 2021

The Maryland Chapter of the Sierra Club supports HB 217. This bill would create a Task Force of diverse stakeholders to review the Maryland Recycling Act (MRA), study the recycling and waste systems in Maryland, and make recommendations on updating the MRA and the feasibility of regional recycling and waste disposal facilities. The Task Force must report its findings and recommendations by June 30, 2023, to the Senate Education, Health, and Environmental Affairs Committee and the House Environment and Transportation Committee.

The MRA, enacted in 1988, provided a foundation for building Maryland’s recycling and diversion systems. Its regulations have been updated incrementally, but the time has come for a more comprehensive review. In the 34 years since its passage, our trash stream has changed markedly both in types of waste and volume. For example, there has been exponential growth of consumer and industrial plastic waste with few recycling alternatives, more sophisticated and varied batteries, and an increased imperative to divert organic matter from landfills to reduce methane emissions. New processes for treatment of waste have arisen. And waste reduction has become an even greater imperative. Maryland is facing increased costs for recycling and disposal; shrinking capacity in existing landfills; and rising concern about the toxicity of products and implications for their recycling and incineration. While the MRA set a voluntary waste diversion goal of 60% by 2020, Maryland’s actual diversion rate was only 45% in 2019.¹ To make meaningful improvements in reducing waste, conserving resources, and increasing recycling and composting of the rest, we urgently need a comprehensive review of the waste stream and diversion possibilities as of today.

The Task Force will be able to build on the findings of the summer 2020 Environment and Transportation Committee Work Group on Waste Reduction and Recycling. We appreciate that HB 217 incorporates greater representation by counties; participation of environmental groups; review of recycling and waste systems in Maryland; adoption of the principle of zero waste as one of the criteria in assessing the feasibility of regional recycling and waste disposal facilities; and a realistic timeline for the Task Force to deliver its findings and recommendations.

For these reasons, we respectfully request a favorable report on HB 217.

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¹ The 45% diversion rate is the sum of the 40.5% recycling rate and a 4.5% source reduction credit. (MDE. 2021. *Maryland Solid Waste Management and Diversion Report, 2020*, p. 2.)

Founded in 1892, the Sierra Club is America’s oldest and largest grassroots environmental organization. The Maryland Chapter has over 70,000 members and supporters, and the Sierra Club nationwide has approximately 800,000 members.