

HB217: Task Force on Recycling Policy and Recycling and Waste Systems in Maryland

House Environment and Transportation Committee

February 2, 2022

Position: Favorable with Amendments

Dear Chair Barve, Vice Chair Stein, and Members of the Committee:

Thank you for holding this hearing on HB217 and I thank Delegates Love and Ruth for developing this legislation to improve waste recycling, diversion and disposal in Maryland. My name is Deborah Cohn. As a Montgomery County resident I volunteer with several local environmental groups to strengthen the County's zero waste efforts and increase diversion of materials from our waste stream.

I encourage the Committee to support this legislation after adopting certain amendments that will strengthen the Task Force's ability to make the most informed recommendations to update and strengthen recycling policy and recycling and waste systems in Maryland.

The Maryland Recycling Act was enacted in 1988 and over time, has been strengthened. Most recently it was amended to ensure that toxic incineration ash can no longer count as recycling. But it is due for further updates. For example, including construction and demolition waste (broadly defined to include a full range of building materials) as recycling, while imposing a separate recycling goal for those materials, would induce counties to adopt programs and policies to support development of private sector markets for salvaged building materials, increasing both the supply of and demand for these materials.

To reduce greenhouse gas emissions we need to reduce wasteful production of plastics, glass and other materials. Much of that reduction can be achieved through aggressive zero waste efforts. Some can be achieved through diversion of materials from the waste stream either through composting of food scraps or reuse of existing materials, including through recycling.

The infrastructure, however, is expensive. A Task Force to study updates to the Maryland Recycling Act is necessary to identify changes that will induce and assist counties to increase waste diversion through reduction and reuse of existing materials and composting as well as recycling. Hence, I urge your support of this bill with amendments.

Amend Bill to Include Internationally Recognized Definition of Zero Waste

Any Task Force recommendations need to be informed by a definition of zero waste. I urge the committee to amend HB 217 to include the definition developed by Zero Waste International. The Zero Waste International Alliance's definition of zero waste is the only peer-reviewed, internationally-accepted definition: *"The conservation of all resources by means of responsible production, consumption, reuse, and recovery of products, packaging, and materials without burning and with no discharges to land, water, or air that threaten the environment or human health."* Adding this definition will ensure that the Task Force prioritizes reduction and diversion strategies such as composting and recycling in its recommendations. It also makes clear that the Task Force should not encourage the construction of new incinerators, chemical recycling plants, or other polluting methods of waste disposal. All of these "solutions" would exacerbate greenhouse gas emissions and would be incompatible with the Zero Waste International Hierarchy. For this reason the Committee should amend HB217 to incorporate the Zero Waste International's definition of zero waste and require the Task Force to consider that hierarchy when making its recommendations.

Amend Bill to Include Composting and Waste Diversion to Feasibility Study

The Zero Waste International Alliance has developed the only internationally peer reviewed Zero Waste hierarchy of highest and best use of materials. <https://zwia.org/zwh/>. I encourage the committee to amend Section (f)(3)(ii) of the bill to include regional composting and waste diversion facilities in addition to recycling and waste disposal facilities. The bill would thus require the Task Force to make recommendations on “the feasibility of implementing regional recycling, *composting*, *waste diversion*, and waste disposal facilities.” Composting of food scraps typically can divert a meaningful portion of the waste stream. A 2017 Waste Characterization Study for Montgomery County showed that food waste represented 17% of the waste stream.


2017 Waste Characterization Study Summary of Results

Composting of food scraps is a low-cost means of reducing waste volume and removing organics from the waste stream reduces methane emissions from landfills. Counties need to increase composting capacity. Waste diversion is also a key part of reducing the waste stream, through reuse and repair of existing products.

Amend Bill to Add Needs Assessment of Regional Recycling and Waste Disposal Facilities to Feasibility Study.

Any feasibility recommendations regarding regional recycling and waste disposal facilities, however, must be preceded and informed by a needs assessment. While all counties likely need updated recycling and waste diversion infrastructure, the needs and regulatory requirements of different counties likely will differ. While regional facilities may be appropriate in some situations, perhaps to conserve costs or address land constraints, in many situations local, smaller-scale infrastructure will more likely ensure that counties can retain ownership of and control over their recycling and waste diversion infrastructure, including ensuring that these processes are compatible with sustainable materials management. The needs assessment should inform the Task Force on the types of facilities, local or shared, that will allow counties to implement environmentally sustainable materials management programs.

I urge the Committee to adopt the three amendments outlined in this testimony and report HB 217 favorably. I again thank Delegates Love and Ruth for bringing forth this important bill. Thank you for considering this testimony.



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