

Testimony on: SB903: Renewable Energy Portfolio Standard – Qualifying Biomass and Thermal Biomass Systems
Committee: Senate Finance Committee
Hearing Date: March 2, 2022
Position: OPPOSE

Dear Chair and Members of the Committee,

As a resident of District 16 concerned about climate change for the sake of my infant grandchild who, with his parents, also reside in District 16, and as a utility customer required to support several polluting energy sources currently considered Tier 1 renewable energy sources, I am writing to express my strong opposition to SB903. This bill would expand the definition of “qualifying biomass” and “thermal biomass system” to include the burning of “silvicultural products” and “natural wood waste,” resulting in customer financial support of yet more polluting energy sources.

Maryland’s Renewable Portfolio Standard (RPS), established in 2004, sets goals for Maryland’s transition to renewable energy and determines which energy sources can be used to meet that target. The RPS system was created to allow users of energy to provide funds to support growth of energy sources that do not emit carbon dioxide or equivalents (CO_2-e). Many energy sources deemed “renewable” under Maryland law¹ produce substantial amounts of greenhouse gases. Thus, not all energy sources defined as “renewable” under Maryland law are emissions free, *i.e.*, “clean” renewable energy. Many renewable sources are dirty sources.

SB903 would take us in the wrong direction. It would add to Tier 1 renewable energy new forms of combustion that release greenhouse gases. Allowing silviculture products and natural wood waste to be burned directly as fuel, expanding the types of combustion-based facilities allowed in the RPS, would generate more greenhouse gasses than allowing wood waste to decompose naturally on the forest floor. Burning woody biomass creates an immediate release of carbon and eliminates a long-term carbon sink. Although new trees can be planted, their ability to sequester carbon increases only gradually over many years.² How can we justify subsidizing private economic activities that combust wood waste and silviculture products, and that may indirectly encourage non-sustainable harvesting practices, while with public funds we support planting of one million trees in Maryland? **SB903 represents undesirable public policy that undermines the State’s decarbonization goals.**

Expanding the definition of qualifying biomass in the RPS would result in more utility customer funds supporting pollution that harms the health of Maryland residents. A recent Harvard School of Public Health Study³ found that biomass and wood represent the fastest-growing share of early deaths in the major energy-consuming sectors. Burning wood for electricity produces as much or more pollution than fossil fuels, including coal.⁴ Biomass facilities emit high levels of

¹ MD Code, Public Utilities, §7-701(s).

² According to an article in *Mongabay*, <https://news.mongabay.com/2019/05/tall-and-old-or-dense-and-young-which-kind-of-forest-is-better-for-the-climate> an international team of researchers found in 2014 that a typical tree’s growth continues to accelerate throughout its lifetime. The team recorded growth measurements from multiple trees representing over 400 tree species from tropical, subtropical and temperate regions across six continents. They found that the growth rate for most species “increased continuously” as they aged.

<https://www.nature.com/articles/nature12914>

³ <https://www.hsph.harvard.edu/c-change/news/gas-biomass/>

⁴ Report issued by The Public Employees for Environmental Responsibility (PEER Report). <https://www.marylandmatters.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/02/PEER-Report-Maryland-RPS-2.4.22-Final-w-links1.pdf> at 6.

particulate matter (PM), nitrogen oxides (NOx), carbon monoxide (CO), sulfur dioxide (SO2), lead, mercury, and other hazardous air pollutants that cause asthma, heart disease, lung disease and cancer.⁵

Given the urgency of the climate crisis and the knowledge that people's health will be harmed by biomass facilities, we must not expand the definition of qualifying biomass in the RPS. Given that the Greenhouse Gas Mitigation Working Group of the Maryland Commission on Climate Change is currently conducting a study on woody biomass energy sources' true greenhouse gas impacts, passing this legislation now before that process is completed would be untimely and ill-advised.

Please oppose SB903. Please do not exacerbate the problem of pollution in our Renewable Portfolio Standard.

Thank you.

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⁵ PEER Report at 6.