



Maryland Chapter
P.O. Box 278
Riverdale, MD 20738

Committee: Education, Health, and Environmental Affairs

Testimony on: SB 124 “Public Schools--Grant Program to Reduce and Compost School Waste”

Position: Support

Hearing Date: January 19, 2022

The Maryland Chapter of the Sierra Club urges you to support SB124. This bill would provide grants to county boards and public schools to develop and implement programs for reducing food waste and establish composting of food waste. It will provide funds to educate students and staff about food waste and its environmental and human consequences; support school infrastructure to measure food waste and its reduction; train students and staff on how to implement food waste reduction and composting; contract with a provider of food scrap composting or establish on-site composting bins for in-school organic waste; and undertake other programs to prevent and reduce food waste in public schools.

Benefits of this legislation include:

- **Diversion of food waste from landfills and incinerators.** Food waste decomposes anaerobically in landfills, resulting in methane, a potent greenhouse gas that contributes significantly to climate change. Diversion of food waste will reduce future methane emissions and costs to counties and taxpayers for waste disposal. It will also conserve landfill space. A program launched in Frederick, “Lunch Out of Landfills,” found that 55% of waste generated by one elementary school was organic and could have been diverted. About 9,700 pounds (nearly five tons) of food waste at this school were generated in six months.¹ This amounts to about 14,550 pounds per academic year, or 17.9 pounds per student.² Statewide, this translates to over 15 million pounds of food waste per academic year in Maryland’s public schools.³
- **Reduction of food waste by diverse and efficient approaches.** Means of decreasing food waste may vary significantly between schools; grants to support these efforts can identify the most effective means of reducing waste.

¹ Joe Richardson, Sr., Advisory Council, Mountainside Education and Enrichment.

<http://www.meegreen.org/programs/lunch-out-of-landfills/>

²https://nces.ed.gov/ccd/schoolsearch/school_detail.asp?Search=1&ID=240033000652

³875,650 students were enrolled in Maryland public schools in 2021. [Public School Enrollment Projections 2021 -2030](#). Table 3, page 24.

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 over 800,000 members and nearly four million supporters.

- **Increased composting statewide.** Compost from diverted food waste is a valuable resource, enriching our soil and reducing the need for chemical fertilizers that pollute air and water. If all schools composted, over 15 million pounds of food waste annually could be diverted from landfills and incineration to provide a valuable soil amendment.
- **Education of staff and students on the relationship between food waste and environmental issues, in particular climate change, and how to reduce waste and compost.** Youth are the future of the environment; we must support efforts to instill in them an awareness of the impact of personal habits on the environment. By participating in programs at school, students and staff may then use this knowledge to reduce food waste and compost at home.
- **Promotion of food donations to local needy communities.** Schools may establish and provide methods for providing usable food to local food banks, homes, and other establishments for the needy, including their own population of lower income students.
- **Development of methods to measure and document food waste and its reduction.** Support for schools to divert usable food and compost more food waste will lead to diverse and innovative ways of documenting the scope of the problem and the impact of policy, which can subsequently be used by other entities.
- **Creation of incentives for new commercial composting facilities and supporting existing facilities, growing Maryland's green economy** These commercial facilities can accept vegetative and non-vegetative food waste, as well as other compostable waste, increasing the amount diverted.⁴

With the enactment of SB124, schools across the state would find it easier to participate in programs to reduce food waste and compost the rest. The Maryland Chapter of the Sierra Club respectfully requests a favorable report on SB124.

Kerri Hesley
 Chapter Zero Waste Team
Kerri.Hesley@MDSierra.org

Josh Tulkin
 Chapter Director
Josh.Tulkin@MDSierra.org

⁴<https://thegreenteam.org/recycling-facts/food-waste-reduction/>