



The Senate of Maryland
ANNAPOLIS, MARYLAND 21401

TESTIMONY OF SENATOR SHELLY HETTLEMAN
SB 124 – Public Schools – Grant Program to Reduce and Compost School Waste

In September 2015, the United States set a national goal to reduce food waste by 50% by the year 2030.¹ Our state currently generates almost a million tons of food waste each year, with only 15.5% of these scraps being diverted. The remainder is sent to landfills or incinerators, where it produces greenhouse gas emissions and contributes to climate change.² Maryland is falling far behind to meet national goals.

This bill creates a competitive grant program to support school-based initiatives to prevent, reduce, and compost pre- and post- consumer food waste. This bill passed unanimously out of the Senate EHEA Committee and the floor. The B&T Committee has approved \$250k in funding for this program.

Food waste diversion involves a lot more than composting! It involves educating students, staff and parents; making school infrastructure improvements: and training students and staff.

Grants would have to support at least one of the following actions:

- Training and education on Offer-Versus-Serve (OVS) in cafeterias
- Developing innovative systems to maximize opportunities to serve food that has already been prepared such as during after school activities or as take-home meals
- Contracting with commercial composters
- Purchasing of on-site composting bins
- Other innovative techniques for managing school-based food waste

Particularly at this moment, we should be doing everything we can to feed hungry students *and* reduce plate waste before it becomes inedible. In Maryland 1 in 7 children face hunger.³ Citing the EPA's Food Recovery Hierarchy, allowing edible food to go to waste creates missed opportunities in the school food value chain.

¹ <https://www.usda.gov/media/press-releases/2015/09/16/usda-and-epa-join-private-sector-charitable-organizations-set>

² <https://mde.maryland.gov/programs/land/recyclingandoperationsprogram/pages/foodscraps.aspx>

³ <https://www.feedingamerica.org/hunger-in-america/maryland>

Food waste suffocates in landfills creating highly potent greenhouse gasses such as methane. In contrast, when converted into compost, food waste can sequester carbon in soils. Compost is a valuable soil amendment that enhances soil fertility, water-holding capacity, organic matter, and structure. In addition to farming and gardens, compost can be utilized for managing storm water run-off and preventing soil erosion.

Our students, communities, and planet can't wait. Reducing and composting school waste is good public policy to meet critical social and environmental needs during these very challenging times. I urge a favorable report on SB124.