



Committee: Education, Health & Environmental Affairs
Testimony on: SB124 - Public Schools-Grant Program to Reduce and Compost School Waste
Organization: Takoma Park Mobilization Environment Committee
Submitting: Diana Younts, Co-Chair
Position: Favorable
Hearing Date: January 19, 2022

Dear Mr. Chairman and Committee Members:

Thank you for allowing our testimony today in support of SB124. Takoma Park Mobilization Environment Committee is a grassroots organization focusing on climate legislation at the state and local level. We urge you to vote favorably on SB124. In Maryland almost a million tons of food waste is generated each year with only 15.5% of these scraps being diverted and the remainder sent to the landfill or incinerators where it produces greenhouse gas emissions, contributing to climate change.

Composting and otherwise diverting food waste are important elements to school districts' Sustainability Policies and this bill would help with the development and implementation of those policies. For instance, the Montgomery County Public School System has instituted a pilot program for composting its food waste pre-consumer. In a three-week period this fall at two of its kitchen facilities, it generated 1 ton of food waste and sent that waste to the compost facility in Prince Georges County that otherwise would have gone to the Dickerson incinerator. Many student groups at MCPS schools have implemented post-consumer food diversion programs funded in part by grants that are not sufficient to fund all the programs the students would like to implement.

This bill helps schools solve their food waste problems, while at the same time educating our children about the value of diverting food waste, by creating a competitive grant program to support school-based initiatives to prevent, reduce, and compost pre- and post-consumer food waste.

Initiatives can include:

- Education for students, staff, parents
- School infrastructure improvements
- Training and education on food waste reduction and composting for staff

- 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
- Contracts with commercial composters
- Purchase of On-site composting bins
- Other innovative techniques for managing school-based food waste

Food Waste Diversion Feeds Hungry Children. The primary goals of these initiatives is to feed hungry students and reduce plate waste before the food becomes inedible. Allowing edible food to go to waste creates missed opportunities in the school food value chain. 1 in 7 children in Maryland face hunger. Diverting otherwise wasted food to these children could be an essential source of nutrition.

Food Waste Suffocates in Landfills Creating Highly Potent Greenhouse Gas Emissions. Food waste in landfills produces methane, a greenhouse gas that is 86 times more potent than carbon dioxide in its first 20 years of release to the atmosphere. In contrast, compost is a valuable soil amendment that enhances soil fertility, soil water-holding capacity, soil organic matter, and soil structure. In addition to farming and gardens, compost can be utilized for managing stormwater run-off and preventing soil erosion (for example, via rain gardens, green roofs, bioswales, compost filter socks, and other "green infrastructure" projects).

For these reasons, we recommend a FAVORABLE report in committee.