



Unitarian Universalist Legislative Ministry of Maryland

Testimony in Support

HB 718 - Renewable Energy Portfolio Standard - Eligible Sources - Alterations (Reclaim Renewable Energy Act of 2023)

To: Chair Barve and the Members of the Environment and Transportation
Committee
From: Phil Webster, PhD
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The Unitarian Universalist Legislative Ministry of Maryland (UULM-MD) strongly supports **HB 718 - Renewable Energy Portfolio Standard - Eligible Sources - Alterations (Reclaim Renewable Energy Act of 2023)** and urges a FAVORABLE report by the committee.

The UULM-MD is a statewide faith-based advocacy organization, with over 1,200 members, based on the Principles of Unitarian Universalism. Unitarian Universalists believe in *justice and equity in human relations* and support passing this legislation to ensure that Maryland ratepayers are getting what they're paying for: renewable energy dollars going to support actual renewable energy.

This bill would eliminate three problematic polluters from Maryland's Renewable Portfolio Standard (RPS):

1. Trash Incineration,
2. Factory Farm Methane, and
3. Woody Biomass.

These items should not be in the RPS because they burn the fuel to generate electricity; which releases carbon pollution into the atmosphere in addition to various toxic substances.

Burning woody biomass facilities harm the health of nearby communities. A recent Harvard School of Public Health Study found that biomass and wood contribute to 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.

However, you can't say the placement of these plants is just or equitable; especially when you look at the inherent biases and systemic racism behind where they are located. Most of these plants are placed in poorer communities and/or communities of color; which has resulted in these communities having significantly worse health outcomes than more affluent communities.

(1) Trash incineration

Trash incineration is a simple "solution" to a very complicated problem. Burning trash maximizes pollution, especially when it is used in lieu of implementing a comprehensive solution, which would include composting, recycling, and reusing products. Incinerating trash disincentivizes the better alternatives for handling our trash. So it defies logic for incineration to be classified as a source of renewable energy, it's not!

(2) Factory Farm Methane Gas

Factory farm methane gas, otherwise known as anaerobic digestion or "biogas," produces methane. Whether drilled out of the ground or manufactured from waste, methane is methane and it leaks. In its "purest" form, methane is an incredibly potent greenhouse gas. When it is burned for energy, methane produces CO₂, which may be less potent, but is still a greenhouse gas. Subsidizing factory farm waste management with "renewable" energy subsidies based on incineration, skews the markets in favor of more pollution, instead of renewable solutions like composting, which could create another product for the farmers to sell, instead of creating a byproduct that we need to clean up.

(3) Woody Biomass

The burning of woody biomass for electricity generation releases greenhouse gasses comparable to coal. Burning woody biomass is thought to be renewable because trees sequester carbon during their growth that is equal to the amount of carbon released in combustion. However, this argument does not include the carbon that the tree would have sequestered were it still living and growing. New research in Germany and Finland support this conclusion. Considering this, burning woody biomass cannot be considered a renewable source of energy.

Since 2008, Maryland ratepayers have spent over \$200 million on Renewable Energy Credits (RECs) from dirty sources misclassified as "renewable." That money should have been supporting the development of new wind and solar power instead of being thrown away to profit polluters.

Two years ago, the legislature wisely eliminated black liquor, a polluting paper mill byproduct, from the RPS. That action freed up money that was being wasted to support real renewable energy instead. For all the good reasons the legislature eliminated black liquor from the RPS, we urge you to pass the Reclaim Renewable Energy Act (HB 718/SB 590) in 2023.

All Marylanders need bold and urgent action! Please keep us on the right and moral path towards a livable climate and a sustainable world. We owe it to our children.

We support this bill and urge a FAVORABLE report in committee.

Phil Webster, PhD

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