

Testimony Supporting HB718

Renewable Energy Portfolio Standard - Eligible Sources - Alterations

(Reclaim Renewable Energy Act of 2023)

House Committee on Economic Matters

Mar 7, 2023 for hearing date Mar 9, 2023

Position: SUPPORT

Dear Chairman Wilson and Members of the Committee,

I am writing to urge this committee to give HB718 a FAVORABLE report.

When Maryland's Renewable Portfolio Standard was created in 2004, the authors stated: "It is the intent of the General Assembly to... reduce greenhouse gas emissions and eliminate carbon-fueled generation from the State's electric grid by using [renewable energy] resources;" (Maryland Statute §7-701.-714.)

But over the years, it has moved further and further from that goal, and is now one of the dirtiest RPSs in the nation. We're funding polluters instead of providing robust support for our state's transition to a renewable energy economy and crucial reductions in greenhouse gas emissions.

I've met with lawmakers who ask things like "what will we do with the trash?" and "why *not* get power from chicken poop?" If the Maryland General Assembly wishes to subsidize those activities, it is certainly free to do so. That is unlikely to happen, however, because none of the "services" provided by trash incineration, factory farm-generated methane, or woody biomass, are preferred methods of managing waste, from either a financial standpoint, nor from the standpoint of public health and welfare. They are in fact among the least efficient, most expensive and most problematic approaches. This is why these industries have hitched their wagons to renewable energy subsidies – by convincing policymakers over time that these losing industries are a "win-win" for the state and its municipalities, rather than the lose-lose they actually represent. All of them fail to serve the original intention of the statute, to promote *real* renewable energy, and fail to provide optimal 21st-century waste management solutions.

Please do not fall for claims that methane from factory farm waste is "renewable" energy. Methane is methane, CH₄, a *carbon* molecule and a powerful greenhouse gas that inevitably leaks when placed in pipelines. Any technology to produce *more* methane, when the globe is in a race to figure out how to reduce existing emissions, has no place in our renewable energy future. Incentivizing large-scale methane production of any kind also entrenches our state's gas infrastructure. This is a step in the wrong direction not only for climate and affected communities near these facilities, but also for the

state's finances: allowing companies to build infrastructure in 2023 for methane production when we are trying to get to zero emissions in a very short timeframe creates the threat of stranded assets, *for which the state will no doubt be left holding the bag.*

The mistaken notion that “wood releases the carbon anyway, so it doesn’t matter if it decomposes or burns,” which I’ve also heard from legislators and fellow Marylanders, reflects a profound misunderstanding of the carbon cycle. While it may be necessary at times to burn woody biomass (or use other technologies to reduce its volume and produce thermal energy), it is a grave mistake to provide financial incentives for doing so, sending massive amounts of greenhouse gas emissions into the atmosphere and claiming dollars that should be going to wind and solar, and incentivizing the destruction of the one carbon capture technology we know actually works: mature trees.

Burning trash, chicken litter, and wood waste, and manufacturing methane all pollute the environment, harm nearby communities’ health, and contribute to the climate crisis: a bad investment of public dollars that every Maryland utility ratepayer contributes to, and an egregious waste of public money.

The renewable energy portfolio should support the conversion of Maryland’s energy sector to technologies that do not produce greenhouse gases and do not create or exacerbate human illness. We could have a clean, green renewable energy future ahead of us if we make the right changes that are available to us.

Extreme heat and flooding exacerbated by the climate crisis is already killing people in Baltimore and around the world, reducing global food production, and wreaking havoc and a variety of other ways too numerous to mention. For human health, for economic and racial justice in our communities, for the health of Maryland’s present and future economy, and to reduce the harms of the climate crisis, I urge you to grant a FAVORABLE report for HB718. Thank you for your time and consideration.

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