



Olivia Bartlett, DoTheMostGood Maryland Team

COMMITTEE: Economic Matters

TESTIMONY ON: HB0718 - Renewable Energy Portfolio Standard – Eligible Sources - Alterations (Reclaim Renewable Energy Act of 2023)

POSITION: FAVORABLE

HEARING DATE: March 9, 2023

BILL CONTACT: Delegate Vaughn Stewart

DoTheMostGood (DTMG) is a progressive grass-roots organization with members in all districts in Montgomery County as well as in several nearby districts. DTMG supports legislation and activities that keep all Maryland residents healthy and safe in a clean environment, uplift all members of our communities, and promote equity across all of our communities. HB0718 furthers these goals.

Maryland has one of the highest rates of death from air pollution in the United States. Using dirty energy sources particularly harms vulnerable populations such as the elderly, children, low-income communities, and communities of color. HB0718 will clean up Maryland's Tier 1 Renewal Energy Portfolio Standards (RPS) by retaining subsidies for clean renewable energy sources and removing subsidies for dirty sources, i.e., trash incineration, woody biomass, and factory farm methane gas. The result will be cleaner air and a cleaner environment and new clean energy jobs for Maryland residents.

Trash incineration

Burning trash for energy is even worse for Marylanders' health and our climate than burning coal and oil. Air pollution from waste incinerators increases the risk of pre-term births, cancers of the blood and lung, and emergency room visits. Trash incineration releases toxins, such as dioxins, furans and mercury, nitrogen oxides (NOx), and PM 2.5 (small particulate matter) into the air. NOx contributes to ozone pollution, which can cause chest pain, coughing, and increased risk of asthma attacks, and exposure to PM 2.5 can cause lung damage and increased risk of heart attacks. Furthermore, burning trash creates a toxic ash that still needs to be disposed of. Trash ash needs to be spread out in landfills to decrease the concentration of toxins that leach into the soil, so the ash actually takes up more landfill space than disposal of regular trash in landfills. Burning trash also releases 90% more greenhouse gas emissions per unit of energy than coal.

Trash incineration was only added to Tier 1 of the RPS in 2011; before then, it had been in Tier 2, designed to sunset by 2019. Maryland is the only state in the country that includes burning of trash in Tier 1 "renewable energy" and thus allows incinerator operators to receive millions of dollars in taxpayer subsidies from the state. These Renewable Energy Credits (RECs) help to prop up trash incineration, make it more profitable, stifle new clean energy development, and disincentivize other ways to reduce trash in Maryland.

Burning woody biomass

In current law, “qualifying biomass” means a nonhazardous, organic material that is available on a renewable or recurring basis and is waste material that is segregated from inorganic waste material and is derived from specific sources. However, not all biomass sources can produce “clean” renewable energy. HB0718 will remove two dirty sources of woody biomass: mill residue, except sawdust and wood shavings, and precommercial soft wood thinning, slash, brush, or yard waste. Burning wood for electricity produces as much or more pollution than fossil fuels, including coal. Biomass facilities emit high levels of particulates, nitrogen oxides, carbon monoxide, sulfur dioxide, lead, mercury, and other hazardous air pollutants. As with trash incineration, Maryland should not be subsidizing through the RPS the burning these types of woody biomass, because they represent a polluting source of energy.

Animal waste methane gas

SB590 removes one additional source of biomass from the RPS: gas produced from the anaerobic decomposition of animal waste or poultry waste. Anaerobic digestion is a process whereby microorganisms break down organic material and produce methane as a byproduct. Whether it is drilled out of the ground or manufactured from waste, methane is methane. Burning methane produces carbon dioxide (a greenhouse gas). Methane also leaks, and when it does, it is an even more potent greenhouse gas than carbon dioxide. Anaerobic digestion also leaves behind a digestate that must be disposed of and does nothing to address the human health and environmental impacts of large, confined animal feeding operations.

Including methane gas from anaerobic digestion of animal waste in the RPS will just subsidize yet another greenhouse gas-emitting source of energy. It will also perpetuate the problems of methane leaks from facilities and pipelines and make it harder for Maryland to reduce its dependence on burning gas as an energy source. There are no such facilities in Maryland yet, but developers are proposing to build them across the Delmarva region. Now is the time to take this problem out of the RPS.

In summary, HB0718 will clean up Maryland’s RPS by retaining subsidies for clean renewable energy sources and removing subsidies for dirty sources that contribute to pollution that harms our health and produce greenhouse gases that contribute to global warming, i.e., trash incineration, woody biomass, and factory farm methane gas. Enactment of HB0718 will ensure that taxpayer subsidized RECs support truly clean energy and incentivize investment in solar, wind, and other clean sources of renewable energy in Maryland. The result will be cleaner air and a cleaner environment and new clean energy jobs for Maryland residents. Enactment of HB0718 will also help Maryland achieve its greenhouse gas emission reduction targets.

Therefore, for all these reasons, DoTheMostGood strongly recommends a **FAVORABLE** report on HB0718.

Respectfully submitted,

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