



3070 M Street, NW
Washington, DC 20007
202.888.2037 (main)
www.prknetwork.org

Dear Chair and Members of the Committee,

Potomac Riverkeeper Network is a member supported organization with the mission of protecting the public's right to clean water in the Potomac watershed. The Potomac River is the Nation's River and provides drinking water for more than 6 million residents in the watershed.

We ask you to support the Reclaim Renewable Energy Act ([HB718/SB590](#)) to eliminate three problematic pollution sources from Maryland's Renewable Portfolio Standard (RPS): trash incineration, factory farm methane, and woody biomass. This legislation would make sure that Maryland ratepayers are getting what they're paying for: renewable energy dollars going to support actual renewable energy.

This legislation would not prohibit these activities, and only prevents them from being subsidized by Maryland ratepayers as a renewable source of energy, since all of these practices produce additional methane – a greenhouse gas. 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.

Trash incineration was added to Tier 1 of the RPS in 2011. Before then, it had been in Tier 2, designed to sunset by 2019. In the original design of the RPS, trash incineration would no longer be eligible for subsidies by now. Incinerating trash creates greenhouse gas emissions as well as harmful local air pollution, and disincentivizes the [better alternatives](#) for handling our trash: reducing, reusing, recycling, and composting. Our communities are [working to move forward](#) with those better alternatives, and it's time for the state to stop holding us back. Now, while we're building the better infrastructure we need, is the time to start subsidizing the things we want and stop subsidizing the things we don't.

Factory farm methane gas, otherwise known as anaerobic digestion or “biogas,” [produces methane](#). No matter the source, methane is methane. Whether drilled out of the ground or manufactured from waste, methane produces CO₂ when burned for energy. Methane also leaks, and when it does, it is an even more potent greenhouse gas than CO₂. As with trash incineration, subsidizing factory farm waste management with “renewable” energy subsidies skews the markets in favor of more pollution. Digesters [would not solve nutrient runoff problems](#) from farm waste; they would exacerbate it. [There are no such facilities in Maryland now](#), but developers are proposing to build them across the Delmarva region. Now is the time to take this problem out of the RPS.

Maryland's **woody biomass** subsidies mostly go to out-of-state sawmills and paper mills burning their own products to power their own operations. These facilities harm the health of nearby communities, and harm the climate. A recent [Harvard School of Public Health Study](#) found that biomass and wood have 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. Let's stop wasting our “renewable energy” money on these out-of-state facilities.



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Two years ago, the legislature wisely eliminated black liquor, a polluting paper mill byproduct, from the RPS. That action freed up the money that was being wasted to support real renewable energy instead. For all of the good reasons the legislature eliminated black liquor from the RPS, we urge you to pass the Reclaim Renewable Energy Act ([HB718/SB590](#)) in 2023.

Thank you,

Betsy Nicholas
Vice President of Programs
Potomac Riverkeeper Network