



Statement in SUPPORT of HB0718 (SB 0590)
Renewable Energy Portfolio Standard - Eligible Sources - Alterations
Reclaim Renewable Energy Act of 2023

March 9, 2023

My name is Sonia Demiray. I am a Frederick County Resident and the co-founder of the Climate Communications Coalition. I am also deeply involved in local forestry. I am here today to oppose the subsidies for wood or woody biomass for energy and express my strong support for HB718. Wood composes 3.4% of the current Renewable Energy Portfolio and I respectfully ask you to remove it, because it is not green, clean, renewable, or sustainable.

1. **Woody Biomass is not clean or green:** When burned, it releases decades or centuries of stored pollution back into the atmosphere. Where there is fire, there is *smoke* -pollution by definition and the origin of the word smog. But it gets worse: producing woody biomass for energy (usually in the form of pellets) adds pollution from logging the trees, transportation of timber, processing, manufacturing, transportation of pellets, and of course the final burning of wood. In fact, burning wood for electricity produces as much or more pollution as fossil fuels, including coal. [Biomass facilities emit high levels of particulate matter](#) (PM), nitrogen oxides (NOx), carbon monoxide (CO), sulfur dioxide (SO₂), lead, mercury, and other hazardous air pollutants. In addition, the dust from the pellet manufacturing facilities also produce dangerous air pollutants including [particulate matter and volatile organic compounds](#) which actively harm the communities surrounding these plants.

2. **Woody Biomass is not renewable or sustainable:** The biomass energy industry likes to state that it is renewable because trees grow back. Trees (especially integral forest ecosystems) as they grow, are the single most effective working mechanism available to scrub our air clean and sink the pollution back into the soils. This is why we are planting one trillion trees worldwide by 2030. However, it will take these trees decades, and forests centuries, to be as effective as the ones being cut down for burning. So are they truly renewable? NO- not in the time-frame we have available to us in this climate emergency – i.e. Maryland wants to reach Net Zero by 2045, we don't have the centuries we need for forest ecosystems to reintegrate.

In fact, the easiest and best way to draw down pollution is by protecting existing forests. [“Proforestation” is also what the International Panel on Climate Change IPCC](#) is advocating for. A mature tree is far better at drawdown, sequestration, and storage than a new seedling. And integral forest ecosystems are far more effective than newly afforested fields for carbon sinks (let alone biodiversity, water, soils, etc.) We must avoid logging the single best tool we have, mature trees and forests, and pretend that the newly afforested field is just as good. A tiny seedling cannot absorb the same as an old oak.



3. **Woody Biomass Industry for Energy destroys our forests:** Waste wood is produced by sustainable forestry practices such as invasive species removal, thinning for fire breaks, etc. These operations are relatively small in scale and very well managed by experts. They are important and much needed, mainly in forests that are close to developed and built up areas. Forest products are also important: we use timber, furniture, plywood, etc. and Maryland's forest product industry is bound to organically grow with the increased afforestation and increased storm damage. The resulting waste wood must be encapsulated and stored- i.e. building material, cellulose, soil conditioners, crates, pallets, particle board, densified wood, etc. but we must refrain from burning it to release stored pollution back into the atmosphere, which worsens climate change

That said, there is a current concerted effort to dramatically expand the Maryland forest product industry to a much larger scale. Current afforestation goals and maturing forests have drawn the attention of timber trade and is fostered among local organizations and government agencies. A major part of this is biomass energy due to its profitability -especially for export. When you invite woody biomass energy industry, the byproduct quickly becomes the product – as we have seen across the South East (a comprehensive documentary about this can be watched [for free online here](#)) and anyone who has visited the Carolinas or Florida lately knows the damage. We must prevent this polluting and destructive industry from settling in among us and syphon away important investments that should go to truly renewable energy.

While woody biomass energy is often positioned as a 'bridge fuel,' the Maryland Forestry Economic Adjustment Strategy ([MFEAS](#)) belies this objective. For example, MFEAS suggests taking advantage of Opportunity Zones (p.21); it highlights the Port of Baltimore for international trade (p. 18); it calls for "all wood and wood residue to be qualified as renewable biomass" (p. 97); the MD Clean Energy Center invited DRAX – one of the biggest clear cutters [to partake in webinars](#) about the benefits of biomass for Maryland while Enviva Biomass, whose clearcutting [methods were uncovered by whistleblowers](#), is already in Bethesda. This is not being set up as a temporary solution. Turning a power plant from burning coal to burning woody biomass such as proposed for Allegany's AES Warrior Run is a false climate change solution that perpetuates environmental injustices and syphons funds away from truly renewable energy sources.

Providing subsidies for woody biomass not only adds unwanted pollution and encourages logging of the only effective mechanism we currently have for draw down, it also opens the door to industrial scale devastation and pollution at a time where the world, including Maryland, must move quickly to stop emitting pollutants into the atmosphere. We urge you to support cleaning up the RPS by removing all THREE dirty options: trash incineration, factory farm biogas, and woody biomass - and - we respectfully urge a favorable report on HB 718.

Thank you!

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