



Committee: Economic Matters
Testimony on: HB0718 - Reclaim Renewable Energy Act of 2023
Organization: Climate Justice Wing of the Maryland Legislative Coalition
Submitting: Laurie McGilvray, Co-Chair
Position: Favorable
Hearing Date: March 9, 2023

Dear Chair and Committee Members:

Thank you for allowing our testimony today in support of HB718. The Maryland Legislative Coalition Climate Justice Wing, a statewide coalition of over 50 grassroots and professional organizations, urges you to vote favorably on HB718.

The Reclaim Renewable Energy Act (HB718) will clean up the Renewable Portfolio Standard (RPS) by retaining subsidies for truly renewable energy sources and removing subsidies for dirty sources, i.e., trash incineration, woody biomass, and factory farm methane gas. As Maryland moves aggressively toward meeting its ambitious greenhouse gas (GHG) reduction goals, we need to align all available incentives toward clean sources of energy and stop incentivizing polluting sources.

Trash incineration

Trash incineration was only added to Tier 1 of the RPS in 2011, making it part of the same subsidized category as wind and solar. In 2015, the Baltimore incinerator emitted on average about twice as much GHG per unit energy produced as each of the coal plants located in Maryland. In addition, air pollution from waste incinerators increase the risk of pre-term births, cancers of the blood and lung, and emergency room visits. According to a Chesapeake Bay Foundation commissioned study, fine particulate matter emitted from the Baltimore “waste-to-energy” facility causes over \$55 million in adverse health effects annually. The Climate Justice Wing supports policies that benefit overburdened and underserved communities, which have historically sustained disproportionate environmental harm. The South Baltimore communities closest to the incinerator are truly overburdened by multiple pollution sources, including the incinerator, and residents experience disproportionate health effects. This polluting source of energy should not be receiving a Renewable Energy Credit (REC) subsidy intended to promote the generation of clean and healthy renewable energy.

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. The bill removes two sources of qualifying 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 of these types of woody biomass, because they represent a polluting source of energy and impact the health of nearby residents.

Animal waste methane gas:

HB718 removes one additional source of “qualifying biomass” from the RPS - gas produced from the anaerobic decomposition of animal waste or poultry waste. Anaerobic digestion is a process whereby micro-organisms breakdown organic material and produce methane as a byproduct. Methane is a powerful greenhouse gas, and burning it produces carbon dioxide (another greenhouse gas). While anaerobic digestion is one way to handle animal waste, it leaves behind a digestate that must be disposed of, in addition to producing methane, and does nothing to address the human health and environmental impacts of large confined animal feeding operations (CAFOs). One significant concern with including methane gas from anaerobic digestion of animal waste in the RPS is that it subsidizes yet another greenhouse gas-emitting source of energy. It also perpetuates the problems of methane leaks from facilities and pipelines, not to mention making it harder for Maryland to reduce its dependence on burning gas as an energy source. Another major concern is that subsidizing the operation of CAFOs through RECs perpetuates the unacceptable health impacts to overburdened communities near the facilities.

By removing these dirty sources of energy from the RPS, Maryland will better direct its subsidies to the truly clean, renewable energy sources of the future. We strongly support HB718 and urge a **FAVORABLE** report in Committee.