

Testimony Supporting SB590

Senate Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee

February 27, 2023

Position: SUPPORT

Dear Chair and Members of the Committee,

As residents of District 46 and medical students concerned about climate change for the health and safety of our patients, we are writing to express our strong support of SB590, the Reclaim Renewable Energy Act, which will make sure that our subsidies for renewable energy through the Renewable Portfolio Standard are going toward actual renewable energy. We are in a climate crisis, and we cannot afford to be spending our renewable energy money on facilities that emit greenhouse gases. Now is the time to double down on Maryland's commitment to truly renewable energy and subsidize the facilities that are emissions-free.

Burning trash, chicken litter, wood waste, and manufacturing methane all have detrimental effects on the environment. This includes pollution, harming nearby communities' health, and contributing to the climate crisis. This equates to a bad investment of public dollars that every Maryland utility ratepayer contributes to. Every Renewable Energy Credit that goes toward a facility that emits greenhouse gases is a Renewable Energy Credit taken away from a facility that does not- an egregious waste of public money. We encourage you to pass the Reclaim Renewable Energy Act so that those funds can support new wind and solar power instead.

Green Energy Can Mitigate the Long-Term Impact of Climate Change on Human Health

Green energy sources also help to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, which contribute to climate change and increased disease burden. Climate change has numerous negative health impacts, including an increase in the frequency and intensity of heat waves, and other extreme weather events, which can lead to illness and death.

- **More Frequent and Severe Allergies:** Climate change can lead to longer and more intense allergy seasons due to increased levels of pollen and other allergens in the air. This can increase the risk of allergic reactions and asthma hospitalizations (Maryland Department of Health, 2020).
- **Higher Incidence of Infectious Diseases:** Climate change can lead to the spread of disease-carrying insects, such as mosquitoes and ticks, which can increase the risk of diseases such as Lyme disease, West Nile virus, and dengue (The New England Journal of Medicine, 2022).
- **Increased Risk of Heat-Related Illness:** As temperatures rise, there is an increased risk of heat exhaustion and heat stroke, particularly for vulnerable populations such as the elderly and those with chronic medical conditions (Maryland Department of Health, 2020).

"Dirty" Energy Sources Negatively Impact Quality of Life of Maryland Residents

As medical students and future physicians, we are acutely aware of the significant negative health impacts of air pollution from "dirty" energy sources. Exposure to air pollution has been linked to a gamut of diseases, including asthma, lung cancer, and cardiovascular diseases, which severely impact both quality of life and economic productivity of Maryland residents. Scaling up Maryland's green

energy sources would have a substantial positive impact on the health of our state's residents. A 2018 study estimated that transitioning to clean energy could prevent over 60,000 premature deaths annually in the United States (Environmental Health Perspectives, 2018). By transitioning away from "dirty" energy sources, Maryland can reduce air pollution, and improve respiratory health, leading to a healthier and more prosperous state.

Subsidizing Trash Incineration Perpetuates Negative Health and Financial Outcomes

Trash incineration poses a significant risk to public health and the environment. Incinerators emit harmful pollutants, like mercury, dioxin, nitrogen oxides and fine and ultrafine particulate matter (PM2.5), that have been linked to cancer and other diseases. Further, incinerators emit more greenhouse gases and mercury per unit of energy produced than coal plants (Energy Justice Network). Subsidizing these incinerators increases their use compared to cheaper and more sustainable waste management alternatives, such as composting.

A notable example of the harmful health effects of incinerators is their release of mercury. Mercury gets into streams and lakes and is concentrated in fish which we then eat. Mercury is toxic to the developing brain of fetuses, infants and children and is associated with abnormalities in cognition, thinking, memory, and language that can be severe if exposure is significant (Journal of Preventive Medicine and Public Health, 2012).

The Maryland Department of Natural Resources found RPS to only play a minimal role in reducing emissions. Maryland's RPS was created to encourage the development of renewable energy sources, but has been used to subsidize trash incineration facilities. Emissions from these facilities overwhelm emission reductions from those truly renewable energy sources supported by RPS. Furthermore, millions of dollars of RPS funding goes out of state to support biomass facilities in Virginia that do not meet Virginia's RPS sustainability requirements. With the new guidelines on what is considered renewable energy, dictated by SB590, emissions will be reduced to a greater extent as compared to what it currently is.

By transitioning to green energy, Maryland can mitigate climate change, reduce the negative health impacts of air pollution, and create a healthier and more sustainable future for its residents. For all of these reasons and many more, please support SB590 and end "renewable energy" subsidies for greenhouse gas-emitting energy sources in Maryland. Thank you.

Sincerely,
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