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FAVORABLE Report – SENATE BILL 0590: Reclaim Renewable Energy Act

Dear Chairperson and Members of the Committee,

We are writing in strong support of **SB0590** on behalf of Waterkeepers Chesapeake, a coalition of seventeen Waterkeepers, Riverkeepers, and Coastkeepers working to protect and maintain the ability of the public to safely enjoy the waters of our State. Waterkeepers Chesapeake supports eliminating polluters like trash incineration and utility-scale biogas from Maryland's Renewable Portfolio Standard, and put clean energy subsidies where they belong: truly renewable, emission-free energy.

Since the RPS program was created, the energy sources considered "renewable" have gotten increasingly dirtier - harming communities of color already overburdened with pollution and diminishing Maryland's chances of cleaning up our grid to act on the climate crisis. Biogas, one of the dirtiest sources on the RPS, is primarily methane but can also include other gasses like carbon dioxide and hydrogen sulfide and is produced when organic material like farm animal waste breaks down. The gas itself is comparable to fracked natural gas, causing similar environmental harm. Research estimates 2 to 4 percent of methane, a potent greenhouse gas contributing to climate change, is lost to the atmosphere in leaks during biogas production; in some cases, up to 15 percent.

The **Reclaim Renewable Energy Act** will remove sources of dirty energy like biogas from the Renewable Portfolio Standard, which will cut emissions while creating jobs and lowering utility bills. Maryland's current RPS considers burning trash and burning chicken litter, amongst other dirty sources, as "renewable energy." Since factory farms produce unmanageable volumes of waste, digester facilities are often touted as a solution to the environmental issues that waste creates. However, this is a false promise

- sending animal waste to a digester creates methane but does nothing to mitigate the significant air quality issues associated with factory farms. By considering biogas from poultry waste and other waste-to-energy sources a qualifying source of renewable energy in Maryland, the state is supporting or subsidizing a dirty energy source when better, cleaner alternatives like wind and solar exist.

Subsidizing dirty energy and pushing the expansion of biogas facilities would create a waste stream that is not well suited for the Eastern Shore of Maryland. Digestate, a byproduct of anaerobic digestion, can contain concentrated nutrients like phosphorus, which is harmful when applied as a fertilizer in areas with already high soil phosphorus levels. Overapplying phosphorus-rich manure from poultry operations has already polluted local waterways and the Chesapeake Bay. Digestate may also contain other contaminants, depending on what is used to produce biogas.

Waterkeepers Chesapeake supports this bill and its expressed goals. By preventing the inclusion of dirty energy sources in the RPS, Maryland can show its priorities are with protecting communities and the environment from the harms these false solutions cause. Therefore, we believe these requirements would properly be carried out under **SB0590** in order to clean the RPS and combat the climate crisis. Maryland cannot afford another year of throwing our “renewable energy” money away on polluters.

For these reasons we support **SB0590** and its goals.

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