



Testimony Supporting SB590
Senate Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee
February 28, 2023

Position: SUPPORT

Dear Chair Feldman and Members of the Committee,

As young people living in Baltimore City who are advocating for ourselves and our peers to have a better environmental future, Baltimore Beyond Plastic is submitting this letter to express our strong support of SB590, the Reclaim Renewable Energy Act. This bill will make sure that subsidies for renewable energy in our state are only going to projects that support a more livable world by removing three types of energy from Maryland’s Renewable Portfolio Standards: trash incineration, woody biomass, and factory farm methane gas. All three of these forms of energy generation pollute the environment, damage public health, and contribute to climate change. It is not acceptable that money coming from our families’ pockets is going to support these harmful industries under current law.

Baltimore Beyond Plastic was formed in 2016 to coordinate youth advocacy efforts around environmental problems facing Baltimore City, particularly those caused by waste and trash and those that impact public health. Trash incineration is a particularly important issue for us because of the invisible harms that it causes. In Baltimore City, our rates of diseases like cancer and asthma are increased by the fact that we are breathing in the mercury and dioxins released by the incineration of not just our own trash, but that of surrounding counties which gets trucked in to be burned here. According to a study by the Chesapeake Bay Foundation, emissions from Baltimore’s trash incinerator cause more than \$55 million in adverse health impacts annually. All of that, and our families get to pay for the subsidies that let it continue!

Trash is only a “renewable” source of energy if we believe that we’re always going to be producing so much waste. Instead, we need to move away from disposability and towards a future where we minimize waste in the first place and deal with any waste that we do generate responsibly. For example, we can use compostable products instead of plastic ones, create jobs in composting, and then use that compost to generate new, healthy soil to grow food in. Doesn’t that sound better than poisoning our air?

One of the members of our leadership team, Aniya Branch (Junior, Western High School), shared this personal reflection for your consideration – “Growing up in a poor predominantly black community I was unaware of trash incinerators. During elementary school, all my peers had asthma or health conditions and I saw a pattern: the people who live in low-income communities tend to have asthma or cancer. I was never educated on trash incinerators and never heard the terms until about a year from now. I have been living in Baltimore for almost 18 years now and just heard about the dangers and effects of it. This needs to end, not only for my generation but for the future generation too. We need to stop before the problem

becomes more than us. This is not only for me but for you and your future grandkids and their children too.”

Please pass the Reclaim Renewable Energy Act so that our funds can support new wind and solar power projects instead of incentivizing industries that are literally choking us. We are going to inherit this world – we’re relying on you to make sure it’s still livable when we do!

Sincerely,

The 2022-2023 Baltimore Beyond Plastic Team, representing students from Baltimore Polytechnic Institute, Bard High School Early College, and Western High School