



Board of County Commissioners

David J. Caporale, President
William R. Atkinson, Commissioner
Creade V. Brodie, Jr., Commissioner
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February 22, 2023

The Honorable Brian J. Feldman, Chair
The Honorable Cheryl C. Kagan, Vice-Chair
Maryland Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee
Miller Senate Office Building, 2 West
11 Bladen Street
Annapolis, Maryland 21401

Re: SB0590- Renewable Energy Portfolio Standard- Eligible Sources- Alterations (Reclaim Renewable Energy Act of 2023)

Dear Chairman Feldman, Vice-Chair Kagan, and Members of the Committee:

The Allegany County Commissioners, duly elected officials representing the residents of Allegany County, a constituent jurisdiction of the State of Maryland, opposes SB 590, "Reclaim Renewable Energy Act of 2023," and urge that it remains in the Committee. This bill, as written, would eliminate the future potential for biomass systems to qualify for "renewable energy credits" with severe implications for forestry, wood waste, and bioenergy operations that will affect the whole of Western Maryland. Woody biomass will play a key role in our region's energy transition, and will guarantee and stimulate the creation of highly skilled and well-paying jobs in the areas of environmental science, forestry, energy, advanced manufacturing and engineering.

In addition, energy derived from woody biomass will secure the health of our forests and help to mitigate environmental disasters, such as the spread of blight and wild fires, by providing a financial incentive to cull problematic tree growth. From speaking with local foresters, it is clear that the closure of the Verso Paper Mill in Luke has spurred a dramatic decrease in the cultivation of low-value, small-diameter wood waste from logging and thinning.

Overgrown forests spread pests and disease, and tree decomposition releases large amounts of methane, which is a significantly denser greenhouse gas than carbon dioxide. Dry and dead matter also create large swaths of combustible material. Just this month, local volunteer fire crews from across the region, including Allegany and Garrett counties in Maryland, Mineral County in West Virginia and Somerset and Bedford counties in Pennsylvania, worked tirelessly to extinguish two massive brush fires in the areas of Corriganville and Rawlings. Replacing the "pulpwood" demand through woody biomass energy will encourage sustainable forestry practices by providing landowners an economic incentive to keep forests healthy and productive.

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This, in turn, will have a multiplying effect on our region, as increased forest health will attract more innovation and investment in sustainable technologies that utilize the natural carbon cycle that is attributed to the growth of trees. New technologies, such as advanced building materials derived from wood (e.g., cross laminated timber), could flourish in Western Maryland in general and Allegany County in particular.

There is also the threat of losing employment base that is already present in Allegany County to consider. Last year, AES Corporation, who owns and operates the Warrior Run Generating Station in Cumberland, announced its intentions to eliminate coal power from its portfolio by January 2026. The plant, which employs roughly 75 well-paid and highly-skilled workers, will potentially be required to transition to another feedstock, and woody biomass provides an alternative that is local, highly abundant and renewable, ensuring regional energy independence. States such as Vermont and New Hampshire are home to commercial biomass generation and include energy and heat derived from woody biomass on their Renewable Portfolio Standards. Allegany County can provide a model for the rest of the state in responsible and sustainable commercial scale energy generation, using the renewable resources in our own back yard.

Finally, biomass energy is not in competition with wind or solar in Allegany County. Eliminating biomass from the RPS will not encourage facilities to consider wind/solar over biomass, it will help maintain the status quo of fossil fuels. A number of institutional users are currently analyzing replacing their current fuel oil, gas or coal heating systems with modern and highly efficient biomass systems. Wind and solar projects have seen great success in Allegany County and will continue to thrive, however, they cannot efficiently provide the thermal load needed to heat homes and schools during the harsh winters the region faces.

The Allegany County Commissioners respectfully request that the committee members give an UNFAVORABLE REPORT to SB 590 and urge the Committee to continue to look for more sustainable options that encourage a diverse renewable energy portfolio while Maryland divests itself from fossil fuels, becoming energy independent.

In closing, our forests are our greatest renewable resource and deserve a place in Maryland's RPS.

Sincerely,

BOARD OF COUNTY COMMISSIONERS
OF ALLEGANY COUNTY, MARYLAND



David J. Caporale, President



Creade V. Brodie, Jr., Commissioner



William R. Atkinson, Commissioner