



Maryland Catholics for Our Common Home

Responding to the cry of the Earth
and the cry of the poor.

Hearing Before Senate Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee
Maryland General Assembly
February 28, 2023

**Statement of Support (FAVORABLE)
of Maryland Catholics for Our Common Home on
SB 590 – Renewable Energy Portfolio Standard - Eligible Sources - Alterations
(Reclaim Renewable Energy Act of 2023)**

Maryland Catholics for Our Common Home (MCCH) is a lay-led organization of Catholics from parishes in the three Catholic dioceses in Maryland: the Archdiocese of Baltimore, the Archdiocese of Washington, and the Diocese of Wilmington. It engages in education about, and advocacy based on, the teachings of the Catholic Church relating to care for creation. MCCH is a grassroots voice for the understanding of Catholic social teaching held by a wide array of Maryland Catholics—over 350 Maryland Catholics have already signed our statement of support for key environmental bills in this session of the General Assembly—but should be distinguished from the Maryland Catholic Conference, which represents the public policy interests of the bishops who lead these three dioceses.

MCCH would like to express our strong support for passage of Senate Bill 590 – Renewable Energy Portfolio Standard - Eligible Sources - Alterations (Reclaim Renewable Energy Act of 2023). As Catholics, we see a strong link between care for God’s creation and care for the poor, as both are an integral part of our faith. That means we endeavor to be on the side of the poor as they are affected by public policies. In his 2015 encyclical, entitled *Laudato Si’: On Care for Our Common Home*,¹ Pope Francis calls for a comprehensive response to the threats from climate change, including “an urgent need to develop policies so that, in the next few years, the emission of carbon dioxide and other highly polluting gases can be drastically reduced, for example, substituting for fossil fuels and developing sources of renewable energy.” (no. 26) *Laudato Si’* also contains a call to “integrate questions of justice in debates on the environment, so as to hear both the cry of the earth and the cry of the poor” (no. 49).

Senate Bill 590 responds to both the cry of the poor and the cry of the Earth by eliminating public subsidies under Maryland’s Renewable Portfolio Standard for three types of dirty energy: trash incineration, woody biomass, and factory-farm methane gas. All three forms of these dirty, albeit renewable, energy sources pollute the environment, harm nearby communities’ health, and contribute to climate change. Subsidizing them takes money away from investments in the clean, renewable energy technologies that we need and that are increasingly available to be quickly scaled up. In addition:

- providing public subsidies for incinerators tilts waste markets toward the worst method of managing our waste (and there are better waste management strategies that are being proposed in other legislation before the General Assembly this year);

¹ The English text of the encyclical, to which the paragraph numbers in the following parentheses refer, can be found at: https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/encyclicals/documents/papa-francesco_20150524_eniclica-laudato-si.html.

- burning woody biomass turns the carbon sinks of forests and woodlands into climate problems; and
- giving incentives to factory-farm digesters produces more methane and this new infrastructure commits us to a future of methane production and combustion, when we need to focus in the coming decades on reducing the production of all greenhouse gases.

There is an environmental injustice at the heart of the present system. Private industries pumping greenhouse gases and particulate pollutants into the air do not need subsidies to remain in business and be profitable. So long as Maryland continues to subsidize these dirty energy sources, it remains complicit in prioritizing private corporate profits over the health of Maryland citizens, the planet, and all its creatures. All God's creatures will suffer the ravages of an overheated planet, including species extinction and rising sea levels that will threaten Maryland shorelines; and in far too many cases the poorest among us are condemned to live beneath or downwind of plumes of toxic emissions, suffering higher rates of asthma or being exposed to cancer-causing emissions.

This bill will ensure that public subsidies for renewable energy through the Renewable Portfolio Standard go toward actual *clean* renewable energy, and are not wasted on energy sources that emit greenhouse gases and result in harmful pollution.

For these reasons we strongly urge your support for this bill. Thank you for your consideration of our views and our respectful request for a **favorable** report on Senate Bill 590.