Committee: Education, Energy, and the Environment
Testimony on: HB399- Gasoline–Powered Leaf Blowers – State Purchase and Use – Prohibition
Organization: Climate Justice Wing of the Maryland Legislative Coalition
Submitting: Laurie McGilvray, Co-Chair
Position: Favorable
Hearing Date: March 1, 2023

Dear Chair and Committee Members:

Thank you for allowing our testimony today in support of HB399. The Maryland Legislative Coalition Climate Justice Wing, a statewide coalition of over 50 grassroots and professional organizations, urges you to vote favorably on HB399.

HB399 prohibits the State from purchasing a gasoline-powered leaf blower (beginning July 1, 2023) and from using a gasoline-powered leaf blower (beginning July 1, 2025). There are multiple concerns with the continued use of leaf blowers powered by fossil fuels. These can broadly be described as falling into the categories of health, equity, and climate change.

First, regarding health concerns, combustion engine-powered leaf blowers are loud, producing loud low frequency noise that makes them much louder than battery-powered blowers, even when their labeled noise levels are the same. The noise from gas blowers travels much longer distances and affects significantly larger numbers of neighbors, especially in settings where the homes are closely spaced. Some combustion engine leaf blowers reach the operator's ears at 100 decibels or more. The World Health Organization (WHO) recommends no more than 85 decibels for 1h per day to prevent hearing loss, while according to the CDC, permanent hearing loss can be caused by 91 decibels for 2 hours or 100 decibels for only 15 minutes a day. Loud noise not only causes hearing loss, but epidemiological studies have shown that environmental noise is a stressor associated with an increased incidence of high blood pressure, heart attacks and stroke. Combustion engine-powered leaf blowers use engines that are highly inefficient and distribute toxicants that, when inhaled, can harm users and bystanders. Exhaust emissions from leaf blowers include hydrocarbons from both burned and unburned fuel, and which combine with other gases in the atmosphere to form ozone, carbon monoxide, fine particulate matter, benzene, acetaldehyde, and formaldehyde. While all these compounds can cause negative health effects, the latter three compounds are considered probable human carcinogens.

Second, regarding the equity concerns, the people at most immediate risk to health damage from the noise and combustion engine emissions are the lawn workers. Many of these individuals use these combustion engine leaf blowers throughout the day, for many days every week. Indifference to their exposure implicitly ignores their long-term health concerns.

Third, the continued use of gas combustion engine-powered leaf blowers perpetuates the use of fossil fuels. The burning of fossil fuels is what has been creating the climate emergency. Several studies have compared the emissions of leaf blowers to that from internal combustion engine (ICE) cars. One hour of running a combustion engine-powered leaf blower produces the same amounts of toxicants as driving an ICE car over 1000 miles. We need to move away from fossil fuels as quickly as possible. Part of that action is to eliminate the routine use of fossil fuels in all our activities.

For these reasons, we support HB399 and urge a **FAVORABLE** report in Committee.