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THE MARYLAND HOUSE OF DELEGATES

ANNAPOLIS, MARYLAND 21401

Testimony: House Bill 399, Gasoline-Powered Leaf Blowers - State Purchase and Use – Prohibition
Committee: Health and Government Operations
Hearing Date: March 1, 2023

I am Delegate Linda Foley, and I am presenting House Bill 399, Gasoline-Powered Leaf Blowers - State Purchase and Use – Prohibition.

First, I note that I have some amendments that limit the scope of this bill. After consulting with the Department of Natural Resources, I am offering an amendment to exempt agencies involved in wildfire management and prescriptive burning from the bill. I am also extending the phased-in ban on use by one year to July 1, 2026. I have another amendment that exempts bi-county agencies from the ban.

In short, House Bill 399 would prohibit the State from purchasing gasoline–powered leaf blowers beginning July 1, 2023, and then, as amended, would prohibit the State from using gasoline–powered leaf blowers three years later, on July 1, 2026.

Last year, the Maryland Legislature passed the Climate Solutions Now Act, one of the most consequential laws in the country to fight the effects of climate change. The Climate Solutions Now Act sets ambitious goals to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. The act calls for a 60% reduction below 2006 levels in fossil-fuel emissions by 2031 and a further goal of net-zero emissions by 2045.

To accomplish this, the climate law includes measures regarding building energy standards, state passenger fleet electrification and a pilot elect school bus program, among many other initiatives. The final plan to reach the 2045 zero-emissions goal will be a data driven process that will require the use of technologies which have been scientifically proven to achieve verifiable carbon reductions. HB 399 supports the use of one of those technologies. It will require the state to eventually use zero-emission electric leaf blowers instead of gasoline-powered, emission-spewing ones.

Gas powered leaf blowers emit hydrocarbons at rates up to nine times higher than electric leaf blowers. For example, the best-selling commercial leaf blower running for one hour emits smog-forming pollution comparable to driving a 2016 Toyota Camry about 1,100 miles or approximately the distance from Washington DC to Miami. One study showed that under normal usage, a leaf blower two-stroke engine emits nearly 300 times the hydrocarbons of a pickup truck and 93 times the hydrocarbons of a sedan, as well as releasing excessive carbon monoxide and nitrous oxides.

In addition, transition to electric blowers will improve the health and safety of state workers who regularly use these devices. Gas-powered blowers not only spew noxious fumes, but they also emit high decibel and low frequency sound, which impacts sleep, creates tension, and can effect human hearts. Electric leaf blowers, at 59 to 65 decibels, are much quieter than gas-powered leaf blowers.

Two-stroke gas powered leaf blowers can cause birds, frogs and other creatures to move away from the noise. Plant life and pollinators are likely to be disrupted by the force and heat from gas-powered blowers.

The State of Maryland currently owns and operates a limited number of leaf blowers across the state. Let me stress that this bill would not require the state to immediately purchase hundreds of electric leaf blowers. It would simply require that as the state's gas-powered blowers wear out, they must be replaced with electric ones. The average life of a leaf blower is around 2 years. By July 1, 2026, we anticipate that most, if not all, of today's gas-powered blowers will have been replaced through attrition.

By the way, the cost of electric blowers is comparable to the cost of gas-powered blowers, and that's before accounting for the high fuel costs associated with gas-powered blowers. Any additional expenses for charging equipment will likely be offset in future years by the obviated need for high-priced fuel and the reduced maintenance costs of electric blowers vs. gas-powered ones.

HB 399 will be a step in the right direction to reduce the environmental impact of gas-powered leaf blowers and help put Maryland on the right path to achieve our ambitious climate goals.

I urge a favorable report. Thank you.