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Prince George's and
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Environment and Transportation
Committee



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THE MARYLAND HOUSE OF DELEGATES
ANNAPOLIS, MARYLAND 21401

House Bill 173

State Lands Collection of Yard Waste

March 26, 2024

Support

Chairman Feldman, Vice Chair Kagan, and esteemed members of the committee:

I am asking for your favorable report for HB 173, a bill that prohibits both state employees and contractors from using single-use plastic containers for yard waste when working on state lands and along state highways. Instead of single-use plastic bags, the bill requires that state employees and contractors to either use a compostable container, such as a brown paper yard waste bag, or a container that will not be discarded with the yard waste (e.g., a reusable container).

Under current Maryland law, there are no restrictions on the employment of single-use plastic containers for yard waste collection on the grounds of state buildings and along state highways.

HB 173 ensures that yard waste collected on state lands and along state highways is disposed of in a more environmentally conscious manner. When single-use plastic bags are used, the collected yard waste, along with the plastic bag, frequently ends up in landfill. According to the World Wildlife Fund, the bags then take up to twenty years to break down.¹ If it goes to a composting facility, the plastic bags are often shredded along with the yard waste. The issue of the disintegrating plastic forces the composting facilities to either invest in imperfect plastic-screening technology, which adds both time and cost to an already slow and expensive process, or to simply produce a contaminated product.

The introduced house bill was amended to 1) clarify that compostable bags be made of paper; and 2) exempt the use of plastic bags for the removal of noxious weeds and invasive species. DNR sometimes uses black plastic bags to kill these plants, once they have been removed.

To date, over one third of Maryland's counties have enacted similar policies for residential yard waste pickup. It is time for the state to operate under the same standards.

Thank you and I urge a favorable report.

¹World Wildlife Fund, "The Lifecycle of Plastics," July 1, 2021