

Committee: Environment and Transportation

Testimony on: SB 56 - "Food Waste and Solid Waste Reduction – Grants, Fund, and Surcharge"

Organization: Climate Parents of Prince George's

Person Submitting: Joseph Jakuta, Lead Volunteer

Position: Favorable

Hearing Date: February 6, 2024



Dear Mr. Chairman and Committee Members:

Thank you for considering our testimony to SB56, which would allow county governments to add a surcharge on solid waste to fund certain programs. Climate Parents is a campaign to reduce climate change-causing pollution in our schools, and our group is active in Prince George's County. In particular, we recently worked directly with Prince George's County Public Schools (PGCPS) technical staff and other advocates to develop a first in the national School Climate Change Action Plan.

Maryland has nearly 900,000 students enrolled in school and this means that our schools produce a large number of meals to feed these students on any given day and even in a perfect situation there will be high amounts of food waste.¹ In Prince George's County, at least 64% of its students participate in the Free and Reduced Lunch Meal (FARM) program, and given some strict federal requirements around fruits and vegetables being served to all students in the FARM program the amount of uneaten food can increase.² Under the current paradigm, this food waste will end up in a landfill, which is a problem. Improvements have occurred in recent years, with composting programs expanding to 17 schools in Prince George's County at the end of the 2022-2023 school year, but that accounts for only 8% of the school programs, and funding is lacking to make this program more widespread.

A problem now is providing the funding to get wide-scale composting programs at schools in Maryland. It is clear that a good number of the schools will need to comply with HB 264, in particular in Prince George's County given both the amount of food waste produced serving students and the existence of the Prince George's County Organics Composting Facility that all of Prince George's schools are within thirty miles of. To begin to solve the "Grant Program to Reduce and Compost School Waste" was to provide school systems with the resources needed to comply with HB 264. However, funding for these grants is minimal, last year only \$195,000 was made available for these grants. Assuming a maximum award allocation, this would only provide funding for 24 schools per year and it would take almost 60 years to provide grant funds to every Maryland school. SB 56 will allow for funds from this surcharge to be used to fund these grants and provide more funds for this vital program.

Prince George's County is also ripe for this type of surcharge to be implemented. In January of 2024, the County implemented the Better Bag Bill, which includes a 10-cent fee on single-use paper bags. Prince George's County also has a Climate Action Plan that specifically calls for "introducing a Pay-as-You-Throw (PAYT) fee structure, which would incentivize residents to recycle and repurpose waste to reduce the disposal fees."³ This type of program will align well with Prince George's climate action goals.

We encourage a FAVORABLE report for this important legislation.

¹ https://planning.maryland.gov/MSDC/Documents/school_enrollment/school_2021/Table1.pdf

² <https://www.pgcps.org/globalassets/offices/accountability/docs---accountability/sprm/2021-2026-equity-strategic-plan.pdf>

³ https://e.issuu.com/embed.html?d=draft_climate_action_plan_01-15-2022&showOtherPublicationsAsSuggestions=true&u=environment.mypgc.us