



Maryland Catholics for Our Common Home

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

Hearing before the Senate Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee
Maryland General Assembly
January 25, 2024

Statement of Support (FAVORABLE) of Maryland Catholics for Our Common Home on SB 146, Reclaim Renewable Energy Act of 2024

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 upon, 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, but it should be distinguished from the Maryland Catholic Conference, which represents the public policy interests of the bishops who lead these three dioceses.

Because we are attuned both to the cry of a distressed Earth and the cry of the poor who suffer first and most from a warming planet, MCCH would like to express our strong support for the passage of Senate Bill 146: the Reclaim Renewable Energy Act of 2024. In his 2015 encyclical, entitled *Laudato Si': On Care for Our Common Home*,¹ Pope Francis called for a comprehensive response to the threats from climate change, including especially “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 (by) substituting for fossil fuels and developing sources of renewable energy.” (*Laudato Si'*, no. 26)

In his 2023 apostolic exhortation on the climate crisis, *Laudate Deum*²—a follow-up to *Laudato Si'*, Pope Francis sounds an even more urgent cry to do much more about reducing carbon dioxide and other greenhouse gas emissions. “I have realized that our responses have not been adequate, while the world in which we live is collapsing and may be nearing the breaking point. In addition to this possibility, it is indubitable that the impact of climate change will increasingly prejudice the lives and families of many persons. We will feel its effects in the areas of healthcare, sources of employment, access to resources, housing, and forced migrations.” (*Laudate Deum*, no. 2)

As Catholics we are concerned with Pope Francis that “the effects of climate change are borne by the most vulnerable people, whether at home or around the world.” (*Laudate Deum*, no. 3) What we do in Maryland matters well beyond our state. As Pope Francis so movingly puts it: “The world sings of an infinite Love: how can we fail to care for it? ... God has joined us so closely to the world around us that

¹ The English text of the encyclical, to which the paragraph numbers in the parentheses refer, can be found at: https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/encyclicals/documents/papa-francesco_20150524_enciclica-laudato-si.html.

² The English text of this apostolic exhortation, to which the paragraph numbers in the parentheses refer, can be found at: https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/apost_exhortations/documents/20231004-laudate-deum.html.

we can feel the desertification of the soil almost as a physical ailment, and the extinction of a species as a painful disfigurement.”³

We are moving too slowly in Maryland, where we have the power to make our climate choices on supporting truly clean and renewable energy. That is irresponsible at this point in time. We have limited resources and do not need to be subsidizing the profits of companies that only have dirty energy to offer. Our focus must be on clean, renewable energy.

Senate Bill 146 responds to both the cry of the poor and the cry of the Earth by eliminating public subsidies for trash incineration under Maryland’s Renewable Portfolio Standard (RPS). This energy source not only pollutes the environment and harms the health of people living in nearby communities, but even more importantly, unlike clean energy sources such as wind, solar and geothermal that Maryland should be supporting, trash incineration contributes to climate change. A 2023 study in *PLOS Climate* found that “incinerators emit more greenhouse gas emissions per unit of electricity produced than *any* other power source”⁴—including coal plants. Subsidizing them takes money away from investments in the clean, renewable energy technologies we need, and that are increasingly available, to be quickly scaled up.

So, MCCH concurs with these points made by Clean Water Action and at least three dozen other environmental organizations in Maryland:

- The purpose of the RPS is to support clean, renewable energy, which Maryland and the planet needs now more than ever. Trash incineration is not clean, renewable energy.
- Maryland is wasting an increasing amount of RPS money on trash incineration, nearly half of it out of state at the Covanta incinerator in Lorton, Virginia.
- Eliminating trash incineration from the RPS is a budget-neutral means of making more money available for renewable energy.
- Eliminating trash incineration from the RPS is recommended in Maryland’s *Climate Pollution Reduction Plan* and the Maryland Commission on Climate Change’s *2023 Annual Report*.

All God’s creatures will suffer the ravages of an overheated planet, including species extinction and rising sea levels that threaten Maryland shorelines; and if we continue to support trash incineration, then the poorest among us will be 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 146.

³ Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium* (24 November 2013), no. 215, English text available at https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/apost_exhortations/documents/papa-francesco_esortazione-ap_20131124_evangelii-gaudium.html.

⁴ Neil Tangri, “Waste incinerators undermine clean energy goals,” *PLOS Climate* 2(6): e0000100, 1 June 2023, <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pclm.0000100>.