

**TESTIMONY OF LISA M. POLYAK**  
**SCIENCE ADVISOR TO THE YORK ROAD PARTNERSHIP, BALTIMORE, MD**  
**SUPPORTING HB1374 – HOUSE ENVIRONMENT & TRANSPORTATION COMMITTEE**  
**MARCH 6, 2024**

Delegate Korman, Delegate Boyce, and Members of the Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to testify. **I urge a favorable vote for HB1374.** I am an environmental engineer and public health scientist. For the last 35 years I have worked for the Army Medical Command and the Defense Health Agency evaluating environmental health exposures for U.S. Servicemembers stationed in the US and around the world. Today, I am appearing in a private capacity as the Science Advisor to the York Road Partnership in Baltimore.

I want to make several points about why this bill is good science and good policy.

1. This bill is good policy because it permits the funeral industry to continue to develop cremation capacity and provides much needed public health protections for neighborhood residents and vulnerable populations. **This is a no cost, low tech solution to a regulatory gap that MDE has not addressed** for this rapidly expanding industry that relies on incinerators.
2. Demand for cremation has risen dramatically in the last 20 years due to necessity and cost. The Maryland State Funeral Directors Association reports that in 2022, 52% of Marylanders needing after-death care chose cremation rather than burial. This demand is reflected in the **116 air permits issued for crematory incinerators by the Maryland Department of the Environment** (MDE). According to MDE records, air permit applications for human crematories have doubled in the last 10 years in Maryland.
3. There are no Federal air quality regulations governing the operation of crematory incinerators; and **MDE regulations on crematories have not been updated in over 30 years** (since 1991). Further, having reviewed a majority of the crematory air permits issued by MDE – I can tell you that there are no permit obligations to perform a stack test or to measure stack emissions to identify what kinds of pollutants are emitted, or to measure whether emissions meet the lone crematory emission standard for particulate matter that appears in COMAR.
4. Unlike regular incinerators, **crematory incinerators have no emission controls, and no monitors that measure how much pollution comes out of the exhaust stack.** The only optional device that some crematories are equipped with is a smoke detector – like the kind you have in your kitchen – that alarms when smoke in the exhaust stack is too dark or too dense.
5. Opponents of this bill state that cremation poses no health risks – that the stack exhaust only contains carbon dioxide and water vapor. We know that this is not true because the American Medical Association estimates that **10% of Americans have a medical device implanted in their body during their lifetime.** Things like pacemakers, defibrillators, drug dispensers, vascular stents, synthetic joints, prosthetic limbs, cosmetic implants and dental fillings which are not removed before cremation. Opposition testimony to this bill cites a report by the Cremation Association of North America (CANA) stating,

*“Additionally there may be pieces of metal in the cremated remains – this metal may come from surgical implants like hip replacements, dental fillings, casket handles, or jewelry that was not removed prior to cremation”.*

**TESTIMONY OF LISA M. POLYAK**  
**SCIENCE ADVISOR TO THE YORK ROAD PARTNERSHIP, BALTIMORE, MD**  
**SUPPORTING HB1374 – HOUSE ENVIRONMENT & TRANSPORTATION COMMITTEE**  
**MARCH 6, 2024**

Crematories are processing much more than just human remains. **Crematories are not designed to incinerate these materials – and because of the lack of pollution control – will just emit the partially burned remnants of medical devices in the stack exhaust and out into the neighborhoods surrounding the incinerator.**

6. In opposition testimony, the MD State Funeral Directors Association (MSFDA) asserted that the demand for cremation in Maryland outstrips available capacity. However, their analysis is based on a faulty estimate of 50 human crematories throughout the state. MDE records show that air permits have been issued for 80 human crematories in Maryland. **MSFDA underestimated existing crematory capacity by 60%.** Using the MSFDA estimate of annual cremation demand in Maryland (28,898) and 252 working days/year – this works out to about 1 or 2 cremations/day for the 80 units with an MDE air permit. Most crematories can handle at least 3 cremations in a workday, so there appears to be plenty of capacity for both the current and projected demand for cremation in Maryland.

7. This is a December 2023 screen shot of air emissions emanating from the Bayview Crematory incinerator located in south Baltimore. In November 2022, MDE re-issued an air permit to two human crematories at this location - both over 20 years old. It is not clear if MDE is aware that some crematories are operating in a manner that clearly violates Maryland air quality regulations. However, **this is a clear example of why citizen health would benefit from a setback** as an administrative control to limit respiratory exposure to events like the one shown in the photo. The full video can be viewed here: <https://www.facebook.com/1032980720/videos/1125284451963680/>

