Linda Foley
Legislative District 15
Montgomery County

Environment and Transportation Committee

The Maryland House of Delegates
6 Bladen Street, Room 220
Annapolis, Maryland 21401
410-841-3052 • 301-858-3052
800-492-7122 *Ext.* 3052
Linda.Foley@house.state.md.us

THE MARYLAND HOUSE OF DELEGATES

ANNAPOLIS, MARYLAND 21401

Testimony: House Bill 91, Fossil Fuel-Powered Lawn and Garden Care - State Purchase, Use, and Contracts – Prohibition
Committee: Health and Government Operations
Hearing Date: January 23, 2024

I am Delegate Linda Foley, and I am presenting House Bill 91, Fossil Fuel-Powered Lawn and Garden Care - State Purchase, Use, and Contracts – Prohibition

First, I wish to note that I have a few amendments that modify this bill: (1) change which part of the Annotated Code of Maryland this bill falls under from Environment to State Finance and Procurement, (2) clarify contractor language, and (3) extend the date of implementation to January 1, 2030 for contractors and subcontractors to comply for the work performed under the contract.

In short, House Bill 91 is a phase-out bill and not a mandatory change-out bill. This bill simply asks the state to lead by example, holding it accountable to reduce greenhouse gas emissions from non-road fossil fuel-powered equipment used for lawn and garden care. The bill makes a reasonable request of the state to switch out fossil fuel-powered equipment to electric-powered equipment after the equipment's useful life or by 2030. This is in keeping with the state's own

Climate Reduction Plan released in December of 2023. It also exempts agencies involved in wildland fire management and prescriptive burning from the bill.

The state would be prohibited from purchasing new gasoline–powered leaf blowers beginning July 1, 2025, but it may continue to use the existing equipment until the end of its useful life up until January 1, 2030. After January 1, 2030, all of the state's lawn and garden care equipment must be electric-powered, if available. An important qualification in this bill is that the equipment must be changed out only if a similar piece of equipment can be purchased in an electric-powered model. If an electric-powered model is not available at the time of replacement, then the newly purchased equipment need not be electric powered.

The Climate Solutions Now Act, is 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 91 supports the use of one of those technologies. It will require the state to eventually use zero-emission non road fossil fuel-powered lawn and garden care equipment instead of gasoline-powered, emission-spewing ones.

For example, gas powered leaf blowers, which are specifically identified in the bill, emit hydrocarbons at rates up to nine times higher than electric leaf blowers. 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.

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

Two-stroke gas powered leaf blowers, for example, 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.

Let me stress that this bill would not require the state to immediately purchase all new equipment in 2025. It would simply require that as the state's gas-powered equipment wears out, it must be replaced with electric equipment.

Like with any of the state's disposable assets, money is already budgeted to replace the state's lawn and garden equipment at the end of its useful life. Incidentally, the cost of electric equipment is comparable to the cost of gas-powered equipment, particularly when accounting for the ongoing high fuel operating costs associated with gas-powered equipment. Any additional expenses for charging equipment will likely be offset in future years by the obviated need for high-priced fuel, plus the reduced maintenance costs of electric equipment vs. gas-powered engines.

HB 91 will be a step in the right direction to reduce the environmental impact of gas-powered lawn and garden care equipment and help put Maryland on the right path to achieve our ambitious climate goals.

I urge a favorable report. Thank you.