

February 7, 2025

Chair Wilson, Economic Matters Committee

230 Taylor House Office Building  
231 Taylor House Office Building  
Annapolis, Maryland 21401

**RE: Testimony in Support of HB 701: Clean Air Quiet Communities Act**

Dear Chair Wilson, Vice Chair Crosby, and members of the Economic Matters Committee,

I strongly urge you to provide a FAVORABLE report on the **Clean Air Quiet Communities Act**. This legislation would reduce a major source of air and noise pollution in our communities, protect landscape worker health, reduce greenhouse gas emissions, and improve public health conditions in our State.

**The Problem**

On days when the landscape crews are blowing leaves in my community with gas leaf blowers, I need to shelter indoors to protect my health and prevent hearing damage. I have a right to a clean and safe environment, as all Marylanders do. Gas leaf blowers prevent me from enjoying that right.

**Air Pollution**

Gas lawn equipment puts out more fine particulate (PM2.5) air pollution in Maryland than 6.4 million cars, far more than all cars and light-duty vehicles registered in our State. Most of this pollution (85%) comes from devices using two-stroke engines (e.g. leaf blowers, push mowers, chain saws, string trimmers.)

Air pollutants like ground-level ozone and PM2.5, even at low levels, cause or contribute to many different health effects including cardiovascular events, cancer, chronic respiratory diseases such as asthma and COPD, compromise the ability of the body to fight respiratory infections, and result in higher morbidity and mortality. Long-term (months to years) exposure to PM2.5 has been linked to reduced lung function growth in children, and premature death particularly in people who have chronic heart or lung diseases.

**Noise Pollution**

Three quarters of Marylanders complain about gas leaf blower noise, saying it impacts their ability to concentrate, work, learn, and sleep, and even affects physical and mental health for some, according to a Maryland Sierra Club survey. Gas leaf blowers have the same effect on birds and other wildlife.

Noise levels from gasoline-powered leaf blowers can reach 90 to 110 decibels at the user's ears. Two hours at 85 dBA or just 15 minutes of daily exposure at 100 dBA can cause permanent hearing damage. Landscape worker noise exposures have been shown to exceed both OSHA standards and construction industry exposures, where half of workers exposed to loud noise have material hearing impairment that impacts their daily life.

Noise pollution also can affect mental health, increase cardiovascular disease and cause sleep disruption. Hearing damage has other health effects including reduced cognitive ability, increased dementia and impacts to balance and walking.

It even shortens lifespans in birds! Studies of 140 bird species with over 3,000,000 observations have shown noise pollution:

- Impedes finding a mate, delays nesting and can lead to nest abandonment
- Impacts birds' ability to listen for predators
- Causes smaller chicks with reduced feather growth indicating poorer health
- Causes changes in chromosomes (telomeres) associated with reduced lifespan!

### **The Solution**

The State of Maryland should set an example through this legislation and start the process of phase-out for gas-powered lawn equipment by not purchasing gas leaf blowers after July 1, 2025, except for a few exceptions. Further, the legislation proposes the State and its contractors phase-out use on State-owned property by January 1, 2030. Then, gas leaf blowers would no longer be sold in Maryland after January 1, 2027.

Please note that this bill will not prevent anyone from using gas leaf blowers on any private or county property, except where local ordinances apply.

### **The Benefits**

**Cost Savings:** Manufacturers say professionals will save roughly \$2,000 annually in fuel and maintenance by switching to battery and electric handheld equipment. Powering with electricity is far less expensive than fuel, and batteries can be used across multiple devices. While batteries can be expensive, they cost less than the fuel used over the product life, making electric devices less expensive overall. Furthermore, they're more reliable and don't need maintenance.

**Worker Health Benefits:** Most importantly, gas leaf blowers are better for worker health! Electric leaf blowers don't put out ANY air pollution at the source. They are much quieter too, and operate well below 85 dBA, reducing harm to employees and others who are nearby. No one wants to hear a gas leaf blower or breathe in the toxins. Using a gas leaf blower is like smoking in a restaurant, it doesn't just cause harm to the smoker, everyone is harmed.

For these reasons I respectfully request a **FAVORABLE** review of **HB 701: Clean Air Quiet Communities Act**.

Sincerely,

David Mosher

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