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Hearing Date: February 11, 2025

Committee: **Economic Matters**

Testimony on: **HB701** Gasoline-Powered Leaf Blowers – Purchase, Use, and Sale – Prohibitions
(Clean Air Quiet Communities Act)

Position: **Support**

Dear Chair C.T. Wilson:

I am writing to you as president of Wild Ones Greater Baltimore to urge your support of banning gas-powered blowers. Wild Ones as an organization is focused on restoring ecosystems and considering native and invasive plants as part of the equation, along with all the wildlife that is connected to the process that defines how life on earth functions. Humans are a huge part of this equation, and a driver of much of the destruction of the connections that are the basis for these functions.

No doubt you will be reading a lot of facts and figures, but I would just like to state that many of the people and animals harmed by gas-powered blowers are innocent bystanders in this harmful practice. Even those folks you would think have a choice, often let their mandates for getting it done faster or with a more powerful piece of equipment overrule their common sense concerns about basic health and welfare of everyone impacted by these machines.

My neighbor across the street, a teacher, augments his income by mowing the lawns of the other neighbors. Initially I thought this might be a nice way to get outside and get some exercise without having to travel too far from home. I couldn't have been more wrong. One day we were walking our dogs and we ended up walking past this thick dark smelly cloud that made us gag and we had to hurry up to get away from it. The noise was deafening and unpleasant. I looked up and saw it was the very same neighbor using gas-powered equipment. I remembered his discussing some of his health issues, and was saddened to see that he was not wearing much in the way of protective equipment. The larger issue is there is no way to contain this toxic mess and it just continues to infiltrate our communities to the point of feeling like there is no way to get away from it if you want to spend any time outdoors.

According to a recent article in the Washington Post, “Short- and long-term exposure to noise pollution has links to a host of health impacts, including, in some cases, increased risk of heart attacks, strokes and other serious heart-related problems, and hearing loss. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention lists gas-powered leaf blowers and lawn mowers among the sources of loud noise that can damage hearing over time.”

Much has already been extensively written about this topic, and the following numbered section is pulled from material provided on ourtownsfoundation.org.

1. **Causes harm to workers:** The primitive two-stroke gas engines in these machines, already outlawed for most uses except lawn care, are direct health threats to the people who use them. In big cities this typically means hired crews, whose members are typically low-wage, in many cases recent immigrants, and rarely with long-term health coverage. They are exposed all day to PM 2.5 particulate pollution and carcinogenic emissions. By the time they are in their 30s or 40s, many will have significant, permanent hearing loss and other health problems.
2. **Habitat destruction.** The focused 200-mph wind out of these blowers, an intensity unknown in nature, destroys plant and animal habitat, blasts away topsoil, converts pesticide residue, animal remains, and animal feces to aerosol, and is generally bad. Do you miss the fireflies you used to see in the summer? One of their big enemies is blowers that eradicate the organic shelter in which their eggs and larvae would spend the winter.
3. **Rapid arrival of battery alternatives.** The obvious modern alternative is at hand, in the form of battery-powered blowers. All the leading manufacturers are now promoting battery models. A company called EGO has led with a battery-only line. Some landscaping contractors are also welcoming the change.
4. **A particular kind of vibration:** The noise of gas blowers really is different. The unique low-frequency vibrations from gas blowers penetrate walls and windows and give gas blowers a ten-times larger “sound footprint” than battery models. To say nothing of the comparison with rakes.

This type of noise pollution can also have a significant impact on wildlife, threatening their ability to reproduce and survive. One study showed that, “hearing overexposure can also lead to temporary or permanent hearing loss. It has been shown that European robins living in urban environments are more likely to sing at night when they are in locations with high levels of daytime noise pollution. This is due to the fact that at night their message can carry through the environment more clearly. The same study showed that daytime noise was a stronger predictor of night singing than, for example, nighttime light pollution.”¹

Not only have I been impacted by birdsong happening during hours I am usually sleeping, but I am aware that the window of time to enjoy the outdoors is narrowing: It is already a juggling act considering how our ever changing weather can make it difficult to enjoy time outdoors, but these windows will continue to narrow as our climate heats up and weather becomes more erratic.

¹Neurobehavioral Alterations from Noise Exposure in Animals: A Systematic Review: <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC9819367/2>

The good news is that this trend is going national. One major city, Seattle, has mandated a ban on gas-powered blowers. Another major city, Oakland, is doing the same. The nation's capital, Washington DC, is well into a successful implementation of a shift away from gas-powered blowers. DC has implemented an effective reporting-and-enforcement system, which can be a model for other communities. Miami Beach, Florida, has implemented a ban. So has Pasadena, California, Evanston, Illinois, White Plains, New York, and Montclair, New Jersey (a grass-roots effort).

Ignoring the cascading effects on these disruptions to the functioning of our ecosystems puts us at great peril for having a tolerable, livable future. We can take a step in the right direction by banning this outdated technology. We have better options now, let's champion them!

By advocating for a ban on gas-powered leaf blowers, Wild Ones Greater Baltimore aims to protect public health, enhance environmental quality, and promote sustainable practices that benefit both current and future generations.

Thank you for your time and consideration,

Amanda Wray

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