February 18, 2025

Re: Senate Bill 480

*Disclaimer: The opinions expressed herein are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the views of The Johns Hopkins University.*

Maryland General Assembly
Senate Education, Energy & the Environment Committee
Miller Senate Office Building
11 Bladen St.
Annapolis, MD 21411

Dear Chair Feldman and Members of the Education, Energy & the Environment Committee:

We are researchers at the Johns Hopkins Center for a Livable Future (CLF) based at the Bloomberg School of Public Health in the Department of Environmental Health and Engineering. Our work involves investigating the interconnections among diet, food production, public health, and the environment. In our work, we have explored the public health implications of generating biogas using anaerobic digesters and animal manure.

SB480 calls for the Department of General Services to establish a Clean Energy Procurement Program with the goal of replacing natural gas used for transportation and buildings with biogas purchases from within and outside of the state of Maryland. We agree that Maryland should reduce reliance on energy that contributes to greenhouse gas emissions and pursue alternative energy sources in line with its net-zero commitment. However, **we are opposed to SB480 for the reasons detailed below**.

**Using biogas for energy generation can contribute to air pollution.** Biogas is not a source of clean energy and should not be considered a climate solution. Biogas is made up of several gases including methane which, when burned, can introduce new sources of air pollution. Anaerobic manure digesters are increasingly being built on farms to extract biogas from animal manure and reduce methane emissions. Releases from these manure digesters could exacerbate chronic exposures among rural populations and may additionally pose acute hazards to workers and fenceline communities. As such, we are concerned about negative implications for public health and environmental justice if the State were to procure manure biogas from industrial animal agriculture operations as part of the proposed Clean Energy Procurement Program.

**Manure biodigesters depend on inputs from high-density industrial farms, which are linked to many environmental injustices and public health concerns.** Beyond the potential for production of manure biogas to contribute to air pollution, we are also concerned that including manure biogas in this program further perpetuates the industrial food animal production model. It is well documented that this model of animal production harms public health and the environment, disproportionately in low-income communities and communities of color. A better long-term strategy for the state would be to invest in wind and solar infrastructure—sources of clean and sustainable energy. If helpful, we are happy to provide more detailed information and scientific literature supporting these points.

Sincerely,

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