

Written Testimony - [SB134](#)

Dear Chair Feldman and Committee members.

I am writing in favor of SENATE BILL 134 sponsored by Senator Hester. My name is Liliana Katz-Hollander, and I am a senior at Richard Montgomery High School, in Montgomery County's 17th district, and a constituent of District 18. I am also the finance director for Compostology, a youth led non-profit based in Montgomery County. For the past 5 years, we have been working to divert food waste in schools from incineration and trash to sustainable composting facilities.

Last year, Compostology led a student movement advocating for the Maryland Grant Program to Reduce & Compost School Waste (SB124-2022). This bill originally allocated \$1.25M for multiple schools to run food waste diversion programs similar to ours. Though only \$250K was allocated at the time, the first year of this grant alone left undeniable impact. Among others, Compostology is one of the many groups that was able to use these funds to create a greener environment in Maryland. We were able to introduce and manage programs in multiple elementary, middle, and high schools throughout the county, each recovering on average 70 unopened food items daily and composting around 800 pounds of food scraps monthly - all of which would otherwise have been trashed.

Whenever I visit a school to teach students about their new composting program, I am in awe of their enthusiasm and investment. They want the chance to learn and be a part of something greater. Society has repeatedly told students that we are the generation that will change the world, but we are currently limited to the classroom when interacting with problems such as climate change and food insecurity. Our food waste diversion programs give students the tools they need to become their own environmental advocates. Not only do we incorporate environmental education into our training on food recovery and composting, but we launch civic education and leadership development activities especially in schools with underfunded PTAs and extracurricular opportunities. Beyond reducing greenhouse gas emissions from school food waste, these programs give students the power to commit to daily habits that build up to something greater than themselves — something that will improve the lives of their classmates, and the world as a whole.

However, the funding from the state for these programs has mostly run out, and the funds provided by the Grant Program to Reduce & Compost School Waste will sunset in June of 2027. Our communities lack the system structures needed for sustainable and effective food waste diversion strategies, especially in schools. It is our responsibility to develop and improve these systems for a more sustainable future. SB134 is needed to continue the positive direct impact of this program so that we can continue making food waste diversion in schools the norm.