Committee: Environment and Transportation

Testimony on: HB 0796 – Recycling – Prohibition on the Chemical Conversion of Plastic

Position: Support

Hearing Date: February 25, 2026

As a resident of Howard County MD, District 3, I urge a favorable report on HB0796. This bill would prohibit certain processes termed "chemical recycling" for the purpose of converting plastic to fuel or chemical feedstock from being classified as recycling and stop construction of facilities using these methods in Maryland. If passed, this bill would take effect on October 1, 2026.

I am writing to express my deep concern regarding the potential for chemical recycling facilities to be permitted in Maryland, specifically regarding the environmental and health risks they pose to our communities. While marketed as a solution to the plastic crisis, these facilities—such as the one proposed in Howard County—often function more like incinerators. These processes are energy-intensive, produce toxic byproducts, and do not encourage companies to seek alternative materials in an effort to reduce plastic waste[1]. Chemical recycling is often termed "plastic to fuel", because a substantial portion of the end product of chemical recycling is fossil fuels[2]. This is why at least 25 states have passed laws reclassifying chemical recycling as manufacturing[3].

Chemical recycling is also more costly and energy intensive than manufacturing virgin plastic[4], rendering these processes as not economically viable in the context of recycling. In fact, the industry has seen high-profile closures due to financial and technical difficulties. For example, the Regenyx facility in Oregon closed in early 2024 after 12 years of struggling with commercial viability[5]. The Fulcrum BioEnergy facility in Nevada filed for bankruptcy in late 2024[6].

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1. Jeswani, Harish K., et al. "Life Cycle Environmental Impacts of Chemical Recycling via Pyrolysis of Mixed Plastic Waste in Comparison with Mechanical Recycling and Energy Recovery." *Science of The Total Environment*, vol. 769, 2021, p. 144483. *Elsevier*, doi:10.1016/j.scitotenv. 2020.144483.
2. Rollinson, Andrew N., and Jumoke M. Oladejo. *Chemical Recycling: Status, Sustainability, and Environmental Impacts*. Global Alliance for Incinerator Alternatives (GAIA), 2020.
3. U.S. PIRG Education Fund. "Chemical Recycling: What You Need to Know." *U.S. PIRG Education Fund*, 18 Apr. 2024, pirg.org/edfund/resources/chemical-recycling-what-you-need-to-know/.
4. Yuan, X., et al. "A Systematic Review of Plastic Recycling: Technology, Environmental Impact and Economic Evaluation." *Science of The Total Environment*, 2024, pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC12301532/.
5. Beyond Plastics. "One of the 11 Constructed Chemical Recycling Facilities in the United States Shuts Down." *Beyond Plastics*, 6 Mar. 2024, www.beyondplastics.org/press-releases/oregon-chemical-recycling-facility-closes-3-6-24.
6. Jeswani, Harish K., et al. "Life Cycle Environmental Impacts of Chemical Recycling via Pyrolysis of Mixed Plastic Waste in Comparison with Mechanical Recycling and Energy Recovery." *Science of The Total Environment*, vol. 769, 2021, p. 144483. *Elsevier*, doi:10.1016/j.scitotenv. 2020.144483. p. 23.

The Brightmark facility in Indiana, once a flagship for the industry, failed to reach commercial scale and saw its assets auctioned off following bankruptcy in 2025[7]. These failures indicate that chemical recycling is not the advanced technology the industry claims it to be.

Not only is chemical recycling a misleading term for costly and energy intensive manufacture of fossil fuels, the environmental and human health risks posed by these facilities is of even greater concern. National data on chemical recycling plants in the U.S. show that these processes frequently produce significant hazardous waste and toxic air emissions, including volatile organic compounds (VOCs) and styrene[1]. They also pose fire and explosion risks[8]. Even at low levels, these emissions are known to affect the central nervous system, causing headaches, fatigue, and developmental concerns in children[9]. The conversion of plastic resins 1-7 can release benzene and dioxins, which are known carcinogens[10]. There is no "safe" level of exposure for these carcinogens, especially when the facility is located mere yards from homes. In Point Township, Pennsylvania, the proposed Encina plant was cancelled due to concerns the waste discharge would contain PFAS (forever chemicals), microplastics, and benzene (a known carcinogen), threatening the drinking water supply for downstream communities[11].

In other parts of the U.S. where these facilities have been permitted to operate, they have faced significant scrutiny due to chemical leaks, hazardous waste production, and air quality issues. For example, the Agilyx facility produced 211 tons of hazardous styrene waste between 2018 and 2022[12]. The Braven Environmental plant in North Carolina, which performs chemical recycling via pyrolysis, has been classified as a large quantity generator of hazardous waste by state legislators[13].

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7. Staub, C. (2025, April 16). *Brightmark Indiana auction advances post-bankruptcy*. Resource Recycling. https://resource-recycling.com/plastics/2025/04/16/brightmark-indiana-auction-advances-post-bankruptcy/
8. Lim, J., et al. "Fire and Explosion Hazards and Safety Management Measures of Waste Plastic-to-Pyrolysis Oil Conversion Process." *Journal of the Korean Society of Safety*, vol. 38, no. 4, 2023, pp. 1-10.
9. Grandjean, Philippe, and Philip J. Landrigan. "Neurobehavioural Effects of Developmental Toxicity." *The Lancet Neurology*, vol. 13, no. 3, 2014, pp. 330-38.
10. Landrigan, Philip J., et al. "The Minderoo-Monaco Commission on Plastics and Human Health." *Annals of Global Health*, vol. 89, no. 1, 2023, p. 23.
11. Bruggers, James. "With 34 Petrochemical 'Plastics Recycling' Plants Proposed Across U.S., a Small PA Town Fights Back — and Wins." *Inside Climate News*, 18 Apr. 2024, insideclimatenews.org/news/18042024/encina-pennsylvania-petrochemical-plastics-recycling-plant-canceled/.
12. Bell, Lisa. *Chemical Recycling: A Dangerous Deception*. Beyond Plastics and International Pollutants Elimination Network (IPEN), Oct. 2023, www.beyondplastics.org/publications/chemical-recycling.
13. Mitchell, Schuyler. "Garbage In, Toxics Out: They Promised 'Advanced Recycling' for Plastics and Delivered Toxic Waste." *The Intercept*, 28 Sept. 2023, theintercept.com/2023/09/28/braven-environmental-plastics-recycling-toxic-waste/.

As you are aware, the W.R. Grace facility sits in the heart of our community. Within a 3-mile radius of this plant, there are at least 10 schools—including Running Brook Elementary, Wilde Lake High, and Longfellow Elementary—where thousands of children spend their day. These students, along with residents in surrounding neighborhoods, face direct health risks from the emissions this technology produces. W.R. Grace claims this is a small "pilot" project, but the technology is unproven and the cumulative impact on our local air quality has not been independently verified. We should not be using a residential hub like Columbia as a testing ground for hazardous industrial processes.

I urge you to support HB0796, which would prohibit chemical recycling that produces fuel or feedstock in Maryland and ensure that "recycling" remains a clean, sustainable process rather than a loophole for plastic incineration. Our priority should be reducing plastic production and improving mechanical recycling, not introducing new industrial hazards to our neighborhoods.

Thank you for your time and for protecting the health of Marylanders.

Sincerely,

Kayla Campasino