

Chair, Vice Chair, and members of the Committee:

My name is Manu Rego, and I am one of the scientists at W. R. Grace & Co., which is headquartered in Columbia, Maryland.

We respectfully oppose House Bill 796 because it would prohibit an entire category of research and innovation that Maryland regulators already oversee through science-based permitting and enforcement.

Given the impact this bill would have on our plastic recycling research project in Columbia, I want to be very clear about what that project is — and where it stands today.

Grace received a permit from the Maryland Department of the Environment to construct a small, research-only pilot lab inside an existing building on our Columbia campus.

This pilot is not a commercial facility and cannot be converted into one. It is designed to safely process about one kilogram of plastic per hour — roughly the weight of two cans of soup — for controlled research purposes only. It is not an incinerator, and no plastic is burned.

Before issuing the permit, MDE conducted a detailed technical review of the project, including emissions controls, safety systems, and monitoring protocols. All exhaust gases are required to pass through a flameless, electric thermal oxidizer, which converts them into carbon dioxide and water. The permit requires continuous monitoring, recordkeeping, and independent emissions testing.

Importantly, MDE determined that there will be no adverse impact to public health or the environment from this project, and that it will not cause violations of any applicable air pollution regulations.

House Bill 796 would replace this kind of case-by-case, science-based oversight with a categorical ban — prohibiting entire chemical processes regardless of scale, controls, or regulatory safeguards. That would prevent research projects like ours from moving forward even after meeting Maryland's environmental standards.

Grace has safely conducted research in Maryland for more than 60 years.

- We invented a catalyst here that helps preserve clean water.
- We developed materials that help keep food fresh and safe.
- We created technologies that make vehicles lighter and more fuel efficient.

Now we are working to help customers recycle plastics that cannot be recycled mechanically — addressing a real environmental challenge.

We are already working with partners to scale this technology. They need data from our Columbia pilot lab to move forward. Wouldn't it be wonderful to say this innovation was proudly born in Maryland?

Maryland already has strong environmental laws and expert regulators to evaluate projects responsibly. We respectfully ask the Committee to allow that system to continue to work — and to oppose House Bill 796.

Thank you for your time and consideration.