

Committee: Environment and Transportation

Testimony on: HB0796 Recycling - Prohibition on the Chemical Conversion of Plastic

Submitting: Deborah Cohn

Position: Favorable

Hearing Date: Feb. 25, 2026

Dear Chair Feldman and Committee Members:

I am submitting testimony in support of HB0796, Recycling - Prohibition on the Chemical Conversion of Plastic due to significant concern over the disposal options for plastic. I am writing based on my years of efforts to close the Montgomery County trash incinerator at Dickerson as a danger to public health.

I contributed, with others, to an early report on the options for closing the trash incinerator at Dickerson which burns trash, including plastic, releases highly toxic pollutants into the air and concentrates the remaining pollutants into toxic ash. While chemical pyrolysis of plastic waste differs in technique, the health and environmental problems are similar if not worse. And the percent of the output of plastic pyrolysis used to produce new plastics is likely only 25 percent. So plastic pyrolysis leads to only minimal recycling, and reduced demand for virgin oil, with significant downsides.

There is no perfect solution to plastic pollution other than drastically reducing demand for plastic products. But pyrolysis is definitely a bad solution. **For this reason I strongly urge this committee to vote favorably on HB0796.**

Pyrolysis involves the thermal decomposition of plastic, heating plastic to temperatures sufficiently high that, in the absence of oxygen, the bonds in large plastic molecules are broken down into smaller molecules without burning (in contrast to incineration). These smaller molecules typically are bio-oil, combustible gases and toxic char. The gases are burned-off or incinerated, with the toxic discharge, as in trash incineration, being released into the local air. The oil, which is a major output, can be refined and sold as fuel, and the toxic char is sent to a landfill (similar to trash incineration).

The Minderoo Foundation, an Australia-based philanthropic organization focused on the environment, calculated that of the roughly 2 million tons of advanced recycling capacity scheduled to come online over the next five years, less than half a million tons of this material will actually be recycled back into plastic products. The rest will be used to power airplanes, trucks, and other heavy transportation. This is not recycling. By and large, plastic pyrolysis is not about reducing the demand for virgin resources and new fossil fuel extraction.

The chemical conversion in pyrolysis is actually a type of incineration, creating the same or greater pollution issues as other incinerators. Even the Montgomery County incinerator

[releases deadly compounds](#) plus [furans, dioxins](#) and others for which there is no safe level. Many of these compounds are known carcinogens, while others, like mercury and lead, are neurotoxins with adverse results for brain and reproductive health. There have also been fires, accidents and leaks at the Montgomery County incinerator.

The time for the public to pay for the costs of industrial plastic pollution is long gone. Pyrolysis, A known public health hazard like pyrolysis should simply be banned in Maryland. For these reasons, I strongly support HB0796 and urge a **FAVORABLE** report in Committee.