

Committee: Education, Health & Environmental Affairs
Testimony on: SB 124 - "Grant Program to Reduce and Compost School Waste"
Organization: Climate Parents of Prince George's
Person Submitting: Joseph Jakuta, Lead Volunteer
Position: Favorable
Hearing Date: January 19, 2022



Dear Mr. Chairman and Committee Members:

Thank you for considering our testimony today in support of SB 124, "Grant Program to Reduce and Compost School Waste." Climate Parents is a campaign to reduce climate change causing pollution in our schools and our group is active on the campaign in Prince George's County.

Maryland has nearly 900,000 students enrolled in school and this means that our schools produce a large number of meals to feed these students on any given day and even in a perfect situation there will be high amounts of food waste.¹ In Prince George's County at least 64% of its students participate in the Free and Reduced Lunch Meal (FARM) program and given some strict federal requirements around fruits and vegetables being served to all students in the FARM program the amount of uneaten food can increase.² Under the current paradigm this food waste will end up in a landfill, which is a problem.

Recent work by the Environmental Integrity Project found a gross underestimation of greenhouse gas emissions from landfills in Maryland and this is largely from methane emissions.³ Methane must be reduced quickly since methane has about 30 times the global warming potential of carbon dioxide. Landfill methane emissions can also negatively harm the health of nearby residents.⁴ Since it is food waste that leads directly to the production of landfill methane emissions it is vital to divert food waste to more productive uses, which is exactly what Maryland General Assembly 2021 House Bill 264 "Organics Recycling and Waste Diversion - Food Residuals" started Maryland down the path of.

A problem now is providing the funding to get wide-scale composting programs at schools in Maryland. It is clear that a good number of the schools will need to comply with HB 264, in particular in Prince George's County given both the amount of food waste produced serving students and the existence of the Prince George's County Organics Composting Facility that all of Prince George's schools are within thirty miles of. SB 124 will be vital for achieving the goals of HB 264 throughout the state, including in Prince George's.

Students want composting programs too. Largo High School has started a composting program that is providing an example to others. Through our volunteer work, we introduced this program to students at Eleanor Roosevelt High School that are progressing. But volunteer pilots will only get us so far.

This grant program will guarantee more students will have access to composting programs in Maryland, that schools can comply with HB 264, and that we can reduce potent harmful methane emissions from landfills.

We encourage a FAVORABLE report for this important legislation.

¹ https://planning.maryland.gov/MSDC/Documents/school_enrollment/school_2021/Table1.pdf

² <https://www.pgcps.org/globalassets/offices/accountability/docs---accountability/sprm/2021-2026-equity-strategic-plan.pdf>

³ Environmental Integrity Project. "Greenhouse Gas Emissions from Maryland's Landfills." 2021.

https://environmentalintegrity.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/06/MD-Landfill-Methane-Report-6.9.2021-unembargoed_with-Attachments.pdf

⁴ Njoku, Prince O et al. "Health and Environmental Risks of Residents Living Close to a Landfill: A Case Study of Thohoyandou Landfill, Limpopo Province, South Africa." *International journal of environmental research and public health* vol. 16,12 2125. 15 Jun. 2019, doi:10.3390/ijerph16122125