

**Committee: Appropriations**

**Testimony on: HB 566 - "School Construction-Design Documents-Waste"**

**Organization: Climate Parents of Prince George's**

**Person Submitting: Joseph Jakuta, Lead Volunteer**

**Position: Favorable, With Amendment**

**Hearing Date: February 17, 2022**



Dear Ms. Chairwoman and Committee Members:

Thank you for considering our testimony today in support of HB 566 - "School Construction-Design Documents-Waste." Climate Parents is a campaign to reduce climate change causing pollution in schools and our group is active in Prince George's County. In particular, we are currently working with Prince George's County Public Schools (PGCPS) technical staff and advocates to develop a Climate Action Plan for PGCPS.

Maryland has nearly 900,000 students enrolled in school and this means that our schools produce a large number of meals to feed them on any given day and even in a perfect situation there will be high amounts of food waste. 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.<sup>1</sup> 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.<sup>2</sup> 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.

This bill goes towards solving that problem by requiring new schools to have the infrastructure necessary for students to separate their food waste, allowing food waste to be composted and diverted from the landfill. One challenge faced now for many schools is that successful composting will not be possible without separate bins.

Students will make use of this infrastructure if it is installed. Largo High School has started a composting program that is providing an example to others, Laurel High School was recently in the Maryland Matters for the work of one student to start composting, and students at Eleanor Roosevelt High School are progressing on a pilot. But volunteer pilots won't lead to the reductions we need in food waste being sent to landfills, that is where this crucial infrastructure required in HB 566 comes in.

We do wish for the Committee to consider one amendment. We would encourage final legislation to require the IAC to require landfill and recycling dumpsters to have sensors to measure total waste (though not composting that is not yet practicable). These sensors have a minimal cost, but can provide long term savings and useful information to school systems. This data is useful to determine if composting or recycling goals are being met at certain schools, saves staff time if facilities do not need materials picked on a given day, and potentially can even tease out if meals served on certain days result in greater levels of waste.

We encourage a **FAVORABLE** report, with **AMENDMENT**, for this important legislation.

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<sup>1</sup> 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](https://environmentalintegrity.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/06/MD-Landfill-Methane-Report-6.9.2021-unembargoed_with-Attachments.pdf)

<sup>2</sup> 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