Committee: Education, Energy, and the Environment
Testimony on: SB 599 - "On-Farm Organics and Wasted Food Reduction and Diversion Grant Programs"
Organization: Climate Parents of Prince George's
Person Submitting: Joseph Jakuta, Lead Volunteer
Position: Favorable
Hearing Date: February 24, 2026

Dear Mr. Chairperson and Committee Members:

Thank you for considering our testimony to SB 599, "On-Farm Organics and Wasted Food Reduction and Diversion Grant Programs", which would establish two grant programs to reduce food waste, of which local education agencies would be one of the organizations eligible to receive the grants. Climate Parents is a campaign to reduce climate change-causing pollution in our schools, and our group is active in Prince George's County. In particular, we recently worked directly with Prince George's County Public Schools (PGCPS) technical staff and other advocates to develop a first in the national School Climate Change Action Plan (CCAP).

In the CCAP action M2 specifically recommends use of expanded composting, Offer versus Serve, Food Share table programs in order to Reduce Food Waste and Increase Composting.[1] Additionally, 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.[2] 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.[3]

Providing the funding to get wide-scale composting programs at schools in Maryland is also affecting the ability of LEAs to comply with state law. It is clear that a good number of the schools need to comply with Environmental Article Section 9–1724.1, as enacted in 2021, 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 PGCPS schools are within thirty miles of.

While adoption of composting in Prince George's County started strong with nearly 10% of schools joining in the first program in the 2022-2023 school year, and the number of schools joining more than doubling in the second year of the program, the following two school years only saw an increase in of 8 schools, leaving 80% of schools without composting as of the 2025-2026 school year.[4] Funds are needed to achieve the requirements of state law and the goals of the PGCPS CCAP.

Compliance with this law is challenging with schools facing budget constraints that establishing the Wasted Food Reduction and Diversion Grant Program will open up more funds to implement composting and other food diversion programs.

We encourage a **FAVORABLE** report for this important legislation.

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[1] https://pgcps.org/globalassets/featured-pages/about-pgcps/docs---about-pgcps/climate-change/pgcps-climate-change-action-plan--april-28-2022.pdf
[2] https://planning.maryland.gov/MSDC/Documents/school_enrollment/school_2021/Table1.pdf
[3] https://www.pgcps.org/globalassets/offices/accountability/docs---accountability/sprm/2021-2026-equity-strategic-plan.pdf
[4] https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/1jjoTFx6W6Di1ZDyH69Elx3eMFKlxDfPeW-yCPSQBIe0/edit?gid=1794882131#gid=1794882131