

House Committee on Environment & Transportation

House Bill 589: Solid Waste Management - Organics Recycling and Waste Diversion - Food Residuals

Position: Support

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Testimony by Brenda Platt, Director, Composting for Community Initiative
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Dear Chair Barve, Vice Chair Stein, and members of the Environment and Transportation Committee:

My name is Brenda Platt and I direct the Composting for Community Initiative at the Institute for Local Self-Reliance, a national nonprofit. I participated for two years on the MD Statewide Compost Work Group, helped develop new regs to permit composting sites, pushed for legislation requiring the State Highway Administration to spec compost in its road projects, and more recently was responsible for the creation of (and served on) MDE's Study Group to look at how to develop infrastructure to recover yard waste, food residuals, and other organics (as a result of HB171 passed in 2017).

The Institute for Local Self-Reliance urges a favorable report on House Bill 589.

For many years, we have advanced composting in the state because of its myriad benefits. Compost adds needed organic matter to soil, sequesters carbon in soil, improves plant growth, conserves water, reduces reliance on chemical pesticides and fertilizers, and helps prevent nutrient run-off and soil erosion. Healthy soils are considered vital to stem climate impacts. Composting also creates four times as many jobs on a per-ton basis as landfilling and trash incineration. Composting can effectively take place in a wide range of sizes including small-scale onsite systems (such as at urban farms, schools, universities, and correctional facilities), farm-scale systems, county and municipal sites, and large-scale industrial sites.

Yet, despite these benefits, most food waste generated in Maryland is disposed in landfills or burned. Of the estimated 839,505 tons of food residuals generated per year by Maryland residents and businesses, only 15% was recovered. **An estimated whopping 736,500 tons of food residuals are generated by large food scrap generators (LFGs) producing 1 or more tons per week.** The Johns Hopkins Center for a Livable Future (CLF) identified approximately 3,961 LFGs located across Maryland. They include supermarkets, hotels, universities, food processing facilities, and food distribution warehouses.

These entities could recycle more if more facilities existed and such facilities were within a reasonable distance. The combined composting capacity for food residuals/manure of existing and planned facilities is only 97,120 tons per year, far below what is needed to accommodate the food waste generated.

There have been several iterations of this bill proposed dating back to 2014. Over the years, I and others have dialogued with interested parties to address concerns. For instance, we've removed requirements for yard waste and clarified that food waste generators can divert their materials to a combination of options such as reduction, food donation, on-site systems, and farms, as well as composting and anaerobic digestion sites.

This bill does not force mulch sites, natural wood waste processors, or composters to accept materials they don't want. Nor does it require food waste generators to source separate and recycle if there's no place to take it within 30 miles. What it does do is send a clear signal to investors that if they build it, they will come.

Food waste generators are not expected to recycle if no facilities exist. While some fear that this bill will increase disposal costs, there's no data to support that. In fact, evidence indicates that this bill will increase competition in the marketplace and lower disposal costs. The opening of new receiving facilities in Maryland will likely decrease overall solid waste management and transportation costs.

This bill will stimulate investment in and expansion of needed capacity to handle recycling of food scraps in Maryland. It will also spur more food waste prevention and rescuing of edible food to feed people.

I offer the following reasons to support this bill:

1. **Composting Is Essential to Reach Higher Recycling Levels in Maryland:** Our 2013 report, *Pay Dirt*, found that there is an enormous opportunity to achieve higher recycling levels in Maryland with comprehensive composting. Almost half the garbage generated is readily biodegradable in composting or anaerobic digestion facilities.
2. **Composting and Compost Use Will Create In-State Businesses and Jobs:** *Pay Dirt* found that for every 1 million tons of yard waste and food waste diverted to composting, with the resulting compost used within the state, 1,400 new jobs could be sustained. We are talking about a new industrial sector for Maryland.
3. **Maryland Has Insufficient Capacity to Recycle Food Scraps:** More capacity is needed within Maryland to handle materials, particularly food scraps. This bill is specifically designed to stimulate investment in in-state capacity.
4. **Policies Are Needed to Expand Composting and Compost Use In Maryland:** Local and state policies are needed to overcome lack of infrastructure and other obstacles to compost expansion. MDE's permitting regulations for compost sites – promulgated summer 2015 – establish a clear regulatory path. This bill now focuses on the next logical steps: encouraging the building of facilities to meet those new regs. MDE's infrastructure study work group looked at food waste recycling requirements in other states (such as Massachusetts, Connecticut, Vermont, Rhode Island, and California) but stopped short of recommending food waste recycling requirements. It is now up to the legislature to act.

MDE's final July 2019 infrastructure report stated: "The Connecticut Department of Energy and Environmental Protection (DEEP) stated that it believed the increase in available feedstock encouraged the development of one operating anaerobic digestion facility, and the agency has approved the construction of three additional facilities. The Rhode Island Department of Environmental Management (DEM) believed that the certainty of organic material supply led to the construction of the state's first commercial anaerobic digester. Also, a commercial scale composting facility and animal feeding operation have begun processing food residuals in Rhode Island. A Massachusetts Department of Environmental Protection (MassDEP) economic impact analysis found that in 2016, the organics recovery industry added approximately \$77 million to the gross state product and generated approximately \$175 million in economic activity. In 2015, organic material haulers and processors managed six and eight times more food residuals, respectively, when compared to 2010. Vermont certified nine composting facilities to process food residuals and/or yard trimmings, and the Vermont Food Bank reported that 3,658 tons of food diverted was through food donation." [pages 22-23]

5. **There Is an Immediate Need to Reduce Biodegradable Materials Landfilled or Burned:** Landfills are a top source of methane, which is an extremely potent greenhouse gas in the short term. As a result, methane regulation has significant short-term potential to slow climate change. The best alternative to landfill disposal for biodegradable materials is not municipal trash combustors, which continuously emit carbon dioxide, but composting and anaerobic digestion. When added to soil, compost sequesters carbon. If we want to stem climate change, we need to act now.

About the Institute for Local Self-Reliance (ILSR): ILSR is a national nonprofit organization with offices in Washington, DC; Minneapolis; and Portland, Maine. Since 1974 we have provided research and technical assistance on waste reduction, renewable energy, and other resource conservation issues to business, government, and citizens groups. We have worked in Maryland for decades to promote recycling-based businesses and jobs and prioritize waste reduction, reuse, and recycling over trash incineration and landfill disposal.