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**Committee: Economic Matters**

**Testimony on: HB332 “Renewable Energy Portfolio Standard – Eligible Sources”**

**Position: Support**

**Hearing Date: February 4, 2021**

The Maryland Sierra Club urges a favorable report from this Committee. We are a strong and long-time proponent of Maryland ending its subsidy for electricity generation from trash incineration, by removing trash incineration as an eligible source in our state’s Renewable Portfolio Standard (RPS).

The RPS is among our state’s most important programs for substantially reducing our emissions of climate-disrupting greenhouse gases. As a result of the RPS, Maryland has been turning – albeit too slowly – toward electricity generated by clean, renewable energy sources like solar and wind.

As presently designed, however, the RPS also incentivizes the use of energy from trash-burning, treating it the same as solar and wind. The process of burning trash for disposal has, as a byproduct, the generation of a modest amount of electricity.

Trash incineration does not belong in the RPS. Trash incineration is not clean or environmentally neutral – it emits climate-disrupting CO<sub>2</sub> and other pollutants which cause serious damage to Marylanders’ health.

Incineration facilities typically emit more CO<sub>2</sub>, dioxin, mercury, nitrogen oxide, and lead than fossil fuel plants. Their residual ash contains high concentrations of harmful toxins including dioxin, mercury, lead, and other heavy metals; these high concentrations rapidly leach into local soil and water.

In particular, the trash incinerator in downtown Baltimore causes major damage to the health of the city’s residents, producing about a third of all industrial air pollution in Baltimore. It emits a substantial amount of mercury and lead – both known to be critical threats to children’s neurologic development. It also is the city’s single largest source of pollutants that cause respiratory disease, sulfur dioxide and nitrogen oxides (NO<sub>x</sub>). Sulfur dioxide triggers acute respiratory irritation, triggering immediate worsening for anyone with an underlying pulmonary disorder, such as COPD. Nitrogen oxides contribute to childhood asthma and are the major source of ground-level ozone (smog) formations that trigger asthma attacks.

The RPS should be focused on incentivizing new, renewable energy facilities which support Maryland’s efforts to mitigate climate change. Both trash incinerators in Maryland supported by the RPS began operations well before the RPS’s first compliance year, which was 2006. The Covanta incinerator in Dickerson, MD began commercial operation in 1995, and the Wheelabrator incinerator in downtown Baltimore began operation in the 1980s. Maryland’s RPS dollars also have been supporting a Covanta incinerator in Fairfax County, Virginia, which began commercial operations in 1990.<sup>1</sup> There is no indication that these facilities require the RPS subsidy to order to remain in operation.

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<sup>1</sup> According to the 2020 Renewable Energy Portfolio Report issued by the Maryland Public Service Commission, the three incinerators had the following percentage shares of retired trash incineration RECs in 2019: Dickerson, 38%; Baltimore, 33%; and Fairfax County, 29%.

Founded in 1892, the Sierra Club is America’s oldest and largest grassroots environmental organization. The Maryland Chapter has over 75,000 members and supporters, and the Sierra Club nationwide has over 800,000 members and nearly four million supporters.

Maryland can fill all of its renewable energy requirements using clean, affordable energy that does not spew toxic substances into our air or release CO<sub>2</sub>. The 2019 Clean Energy Jobs Act will substantially increase the amount of home-grown electricity Maryland consumes, by supporting large increases in solar and offshore wind. The state's Greenhouse Gas Emissions Reduction Act establishes the goal of reducing our greenhouse gas emissions by 40% (compared to the 2006 level) by 2030, and legislation before the General Assembly this session (the Climate Solutions Now Act) would increase that target to 60% by 2030 with the state achieving net-zero emissions by 2045. Using hundreds of thousands of RECs and millions of dollars to support trash incineration will not help us do that.

For all these reasons, we recommend that the Committee give this bill a favorable report.

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