



Monday, Feb 22, 2021

Environment and Transportation Committee  
HB 1094 - Workgroup to Evaluate the Establishment of a Regional Waste Disposal Facility  
Position - Opposed

Dear Chair Barve, Vice-Chair Stein and Members of the Committee,

I am submitting written testimony in opposition to HB 1094, Workgroup to Evaluate the Establishment of a Regional Waste Facility. As it currently stands, this workgroup would not lead Maryland communities down the path to zero waste, a direction desperately needed for the future of our state. As you know, we are in a climate and pollution crisis of great urgency. Together, we must adapt and mitigate to *less, not more* air, water and soil pollution and return our environment to health. We also must *reduce, not expand*, climate-change inducing carbon emissions.

About me: I live in Towson. I am an educator and founding owner/operator of a pioneering zero-waste small business. Founded in 2015, my company is called Echotopia LLC. I make and sell refillable biodegradable cleaning products, such as laundry detergent. Before covid, I sold my products at farmers markets.

For five years, I set up my stall and refill station at Baltimore's two weekend farmers markets, twice monthly. My customer base grew, and in 2019 it simply exploded. I made a profit for the first time. By the end of 2019, we hit a milestone; using my refill station, my customers had prevented over 2,500 items of packaging trash.

I'm concerned that a plan for a single regional waste disposal facility would lead to a facility that involves burning waste, and/or producing 'refuse-derived fuel' to be burned. This would deprive future generations of Marylanders of an opportunity to have a healthier environment for all. I am concerned that the proposed facility would not dispose of waste. It would simply reshape it, adding to the problem of trash. Then, burning would increase toxic air pollution. Plastics pollute, period. They don't break down. They harm life systems everywhere, including, as we now know, our food and our bodies. The idea of re-shaping throw-away plastics materials into something else to be temporarily reused, creates dangerous community pollution and increased carbon emissions, something Marylanders can ill afford.

**While I applaud lawmakers and citizens who have devoted hours working to solve the issue of 'what to do with our trash' in the proposed legislation HB 1094, I respectfully propose another way forward:**

**Success in other communities such as Frederick informs us that a "pay as you throw" (1) policy creates immediate trash-reduction behavioral change among consumers, as does extended producer responsibility done right, where Washington State is leading. (2)**

Additionally, common sense dictates that the successful zero waste path means following the "R's" , more or less in this order:

1. Rot - composting
2. Reduce - reducing community consumption of single use, throw-away items
3. Refill - refill packaging
4. Reuse - reusing items, including taking apart re-sellable and re usable parts of items such as mattresses
5. Repair - fixing things, decreasing planned obsolescence/poor quality items
6. Recycling paper, cardboard, metals and glass. Recycling is the least desirable option, for two obvious reasons. Recycling requires using energy, and energy use can be polluting. Additionally, sorting even these materials for recycling can be difficult or costly. To conclude, even recycling these materials involves investments and learned new behaviors on the part of Marylanders, and should only be a last resort on our zero waste path. As for plastic, we learned in the "The Story of Plastic" movie (3) plastics recycling isn't successful *anywhere* in the world, so let's admit that truth and be innovative.

Though it's necessary it's also complex to transform our economy and habits. But the true zero waste path will benefit our economy. And consumer choice/lack thereof is a factor, as is lobbying on the part of plastics makers, the oil and gas industry that seeks continued profits at any cost. But in 2021, getting to zero waste is more urgent than ever if we want life systems to have a chance in Maryland and beyond.

**This written testimony provides you with good news. In my experience as a zero waste path business owner, I discovered to my delight and relief that Marylanders are hungry for the *true* zero waste path now. I was told this repeatedly, for years, from people from all walks of life, particularly from our youth. Just look at the image at the top of this page, and you'll see many smiling faces.**

I respectfully urge you to reconsider HB1094. I remain opposed to this proposed legislation. I look forward to telling my hundreds of customers about the Maryland General Assembly's holistic, realistic zero waste legislation that benefits everyone in our state. Thank you for your leadership and work on behalf of all Marylanders.

Sincerely,  
Diane Wittner  
Echotopia LLC, A Zero Waste Business  
Towson & Baltimore, Maryland  
[diane@echotopia.org](mailto:diane@echotopia.org)

(1) *City of Frederick Key to Recycling in Frederick County, Maryland*  
<https://ilsr.org/city-of-frederick-key-to-recycling-in-frederick-county-maryland/>

(2) *With recycling's dirty truths exposed, Washington works toward a cleaner, more sustainable system*  
<https://www.seattletimes.com/pacific-nw-magazine/with-recyclings-dirty-truths-exposed-washington-works-toward-a-cleaner-more-sustainable-system/>

(3) *Story of Plastics movie, 2019*  
<https://123fullmovies.co/the-story-of-plastic-full-movies-666227.html>