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SIERRA CLUB
MARYLAND CHAPTER

House Bill 1085

Renewable Energy Portfolio Standard – Qualifying Biomass and Thermal Biomass Systems

Date: March 4, 2022

From: Chesapeake Bay Foundation
Chesapeake Climate Action Network Action Fund
Sierra Club Maryland Chapter
Chesapeake Physicians for Social Responsibility
Indivisible Howard County
Elders Climate Action Maryland
350MoCo
Unitarian Universalist Legislative Ministry of Maryland

Position: **Oppose**

To: House Economic Matters

The above-listed organizations **OPPOSE** HB 1085 which broadens the definition of qualifying biomass as a Tier 1 Renewable Energy Source and allows those sources to be burned directly as fuel.

Our organizations have supported the conversion of biomass from a waste product to a fuel source so long as doing so results in a net environmental improvement. For example, animal manure which has been produced in excess resulting in phosphorus-saturated soils and phosphorus runoff to waters of the state and Chesapeake Bay can be digested anaerobically to produce clean burning fuel for heat and electricity production at or near the source of that energy use. Doing so reduces the total weight of any waste product (digestate) which may need to be transported, assists the state in implementing the Phosphorus Management Tool to address excess manure application to farm fields and reduces reliance on fossil fuels for those same energy needs.

The allowance of “silvicultural products and natural wood waste” to be burned directly as fuel has the potential to increase deforestation across the state, generate more greenhouse gases than the natural decomposition of those components of forestry and emit soot particles known to cause respiratory issues. We see these as compounding environmental negatives as compared to the status quo. Inclusion of these sources into the Renewable Energy Portfolio Standard must come with a rigorous life-cycle analysis that demonstrates a reduction in water and air pollution, including greenhouse gases.

Current analysis by the Mitigation Working Group of the Maryland Commission on Climate Change is underway that focuses on the impacts to other Tier 1 resources. Without a deeper understanding of the impacts to energy sources like solar and wind – that have zero carbon emissions – it’s premature to include biomass as a Tier 1 resource. The recommendations for how or if to include biomass as a Tier 1 is due later this year and we should give that body the opportunity to complete the analysis.

We urge the Committee’s UNFAVORABLE report on HB 1085.