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Committee: Economic Matters

Testimony on: HB1085 – Renewable Energy Portfolio Standard - Qualifying Biomass and Thermal Biomass Systems

Position: Unfavorable

Hearing Date: March 4, 2022

Bill Contact: Delegate Jason Buckel

DoTheMostGood (DTMG) is a progressive grass-roots organization with more than 3000 members in all districts in Montgomery County as well as several nearby jurisdictions. DTMG supports legislation and activities that keep residents healthy and safe in a clean environment, uplift all residents, and promote equity across all our diverse communities. DTMG strongly opposes HB1085 because it will increase the amount of dirty, greenhouse gas-producing fuels in Maryland's "clean" renewable portfolio standards which will hurt our environment.

The latest reports from world-wide climate scientists make it very clear that we must rapidly reduce greenhouse gas emissions in order to avoid the worst effects of climate change due to global warming. The best way to do that is to move away from burning things to make energy.

Maryland's renewable portfolio standards (RPS) are among our state's most important programs for substantially reducing our greenhouse gas emissions. The increased importance of the RPS under the 2019 Clean Energy Jobs Act means it should be focused on incentivizing new clean renewable energy facilities which will support Maryland's efforts to mitigate climate change. Currently, the RPS provides Tier 1 status only to thermal energy generators that primarily combust animal manure. Qualifying biomass may be combusted only as a secondary component of the feedstock.

The Maryland Legislature has focused on removing dirty fuels, such as black liquor, from the RPS. However, HB1085 will take us in the opposite direction and add dirty fuels. HB1085 proposes to modify the provisions of Maryland's RPS to provide Tier 1 status to qualifying biomass burned as a sole feedstock to produce thermal energy. Incineration of biomass for heat production increases pollution in Maryland, releases greenhouse gases into the air, and leads to deposition of nitrogen oxide in the Bay when it rains.

HB1085 also circumvents Maryland's progress towards alternative uses of animal manure and food waste. The diversion of animal litter and food waste to a cheaper, more polluting process will increase our greenhouse gas emissions and will undermine truly renewable sources, such as wind, solar, and geothermal, in the renewable energy portfolio.

Furthermore, HB1085 is a modification of SB0549 that was introduced in the 2021 General Assembly Session. The House committee referred the 2021 bill for study rather than take immediate action. The Maryland Commission on Climate Change (MCCC) established a Mitigation Working Group to study the issue and to make recommendations. That report is expected to be completed in Fall, 2023. The General Assembly should respect the mandate to the MCCC and, at a minimum, take no action until the report has been published and fully digested.

Moreover, last year's bill was referred for study in part because its definitional terms were vague and the scope of the impact of that bill was unclear. However, instead of seeking to limit the scope of qualifying biomass, HB1085 would include "all raw products" produced from a forest – including whole trees – in qualifying biomass and could vastly accelerate the deforestation of Maryland through opening the door to abusive forestry practices. HB1085 will incentivize burning trees. This is just wrong.

In summary, HB1085 is just bad for the environment and will lead to increased release of CO2 and other pollutants. DTMG therefore strongly opposes HB1085 and urges a **UNFAVORABLE** report on this bill.

Respectfully submitted,

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