

**Testimony on Maryland House Bill 1121  
Renewable Energy Portfolio – Waste-to-Energy**

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House Economic Matters Committee**

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Thank you for the opportunity to testify today. My name is Brenda Platt and I am the co-director of the Institute for Local Self-Reliance, based in Washington, DC. I have worked 25 years on solid waste issues. I am a Maryland resident.

I hope you will give House Bill 1121 an unfavorable vote. If passed, this bill would be a serious step backwards for MD achieving either a clean energy future or making progress on reducing waste.

The trend all over the country is moving away from burn and bury and towards more reuse, recycling, and composting. At least one-third of our waste stream is readily compostable. More than 21 states have or are updating their composting policies to ensure development of a sound composting industry. Unfortunately, this is not the case in MD.

Massachusetts has had a 20-year moratorium on building new incinerators. Over the last 2 years, the MassDEP has considered lifting this moratorium, something it has considered as part of updating its solid waste management master plan. Where are things now? MassDEP has issued its draft *2010-2020 Solid Waste Master Plan: A Pathway to Zero Waste* for public comment. The document calls for “keeping in place the state's current moratorium on new municipal waste combustion facilities, expanding public and private sector recycling and reuse of waste materials, ensuring greater producer responsibility for materials management, and increasing promotion of recycling businesses and green jobs.”

Maryland is behind the times. Reducing trash sent to landfills is a vital goal but I can assure you that giving subsidies to incineration is the opposite of what needs to happen. Building more waste incinerators to control waste is like loosening one's belt to control obesity.

Incinerators don't make landfills magically disappear. 25% of what's burned is ash requiring landfill disposal.

Trash burning should not be considered renewable energy. Trash is not renewable.

Incinerators burn discarded resources and the embodied energy they contain. They destroy rather than conserve materials. For every ton of material destroyed by incineration, many more tons of raw materials must be mined, processed, or distributed to manufacture a new product to take its place. More trees must be cut down to make paper. More ore must be mined for metal production. More petroleum must be processed into plastics. On the whole, three to five times more energy can be saved by recycling materials than by burning them.

Burning trash requires waste. You have to feed those facilities to make good on bond payments. Incinerators perpetuate the throw-away society and encourage a one-way flow of materials on a finite planet. They make the task of conserving resources and reducing waste more difficult, not easier. Communities with the highest recycling levels – San Francisco, Seattle, Toronto – do not have incinerators.

Burning trash is the most expensive solid waste management technology on the market.

In Frederick County, Maryland, the proposed 1,500 ton-per-day incinerator is slated to cost about \$500 million. Compare this to a similarly sized recycling facility in Elkridge, MD. Its capital investment was under \$20 million.

Alternatives are cheaper and better. Let's incentivize these. If a community directs \$500 million towards incineration, it will not give the alternatives the resources they need to develop.

Burning trash is financially risky. Harrisburg, the capital of Pennsylvania, considered bankruptcy last year because it faced \$68 million in debt payments related to a failed incinerator. In New Jersey, counties that built incinerators accumulated \$1.35 billion in debt. Voters had to approve a multi-million dollar state bailout.

Burning trash is highly polluting. Incinerators release acid gases, particulate matter, carbon monoxide, nitrogen oxides, metals, dioxins and furans, and at least 190 volatile organic compounds, many of which are not monitored. Garbage in, garbage out. If there is mercury and other heavy metals in electronics going in, these heavy metals are coming out somewhere. Coal plants do not burn pharmaceuticals, batteries, or electronics. One major uncertainty is the effects of "air toxics," a variety of incompletely investigated chemicals like benzene and trichloroethylene. Waste incinerators emit more of these chemicals than do fossil-fueled power plants.

It is absolutely not true that burning trash produces electricity with less environmental impact than other sources. Incinerators emit more CO<sub>2</sub> per megawatt-hour than coal-fired, natural-gas-fired, or oil-fired power plants.

Trash incinerators are bad for the climate.

A quarter to a third of capital costs alone are spent trying to control pollution from these facilities. And, you can't compare MD to Europe, which has stringent producer responsibility legislation and is banning chemicals of high concern from all types of products.

The dangers of incineration are widely known and have greatly influenced the public's assessment of municipal solid waste incineration technologies. This is the main reason no new incinerators have been built in the US since the mid-1990s. In fact, 290 planned modern incinerators were shelved between 1987 and 1995.

Incinerators do not create green jobs. Compared to recycling and composting, they actually have very low job creation potential. For every 10,000 tons per year going into an incinerator, one job is created. If you send 10,000 tons per year to a compost facility, four jobs would be created. Recycling sustains 10 times the number of jobs on a per ton basis.

Do not allow incinerators to be subsidized in Maryland. Far from benefiting the climate, subsidies to these systems encourage wasting and resource consumption. Environment America, the Sierra Club, the Natural Resources Defense Council, Friends of the Earth, and 130 other organizations recognize the inappropriateness of public subsidization of these technologies and have signed a statement calling for no incentives for incinerators.