

House Environment and Transportation Committee

House Bill 743 – Yard Waste and Food Residuals Diversion and Infrastructure Task Force

Position: Support

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Testimony by Brenda Platt, Co-Director, Institute for Local Self-Reliance, bplatt@ilsr.org

My name is Brenda Platt and I am the co-director of the Institute for Local Self-Reliance, a nonprofit research and technical assistance organization, where I have worked on solid waste issues for 30 years. I head up our MD Composting Makes \$en\$e Project, which is advancing composting in the state as a key strategy to create jobs, enhance soils, protect the climate and regional watersheds, and reduce waste. I participated for two years on the MD Statewide Compost Work Group and have been pleased to support the development of new regs to permit composting sites. I am also on the steering committee of the MD-DC Compost Council.

The Institute for Local Self-Reliance urges a favorable report on House Bill 743.

This bill will stimulate investment in and expansion of needed capacity to handle recycling of food scraps and yard trimmings in Maryland. The task force will build critical stakeholder support for programs and policies that will divert valuable organic materials to beneficial use and help the state achieve its waste reduction and recycling goals.

I offer the following reasons to support this bill:

1. **Composting Is Essential to Reach Higher Recycling Levels in Maryland:** My 2013 report, *Pay Dirt*, found that there is an enormous opportunity to achieve higher recycling levels in Maryland with comprehensive composting. There's plenty of room to recover more leaves and yard trimmings, and most food scraps in the state are landfilled or burned. Almost half the garbage we set out at the curb is readily biodegradable in composting or anaerobic digestion facilities.
2. **Composting and Compost Use Will Create In-State Businesses and Jobs:** *Pay Dirt* found that for every 1 million tons of yard waste and food waste diverted to composting, with the resulting compost used within the state, 1,400 new jobs could be sustained. This underlines the importance of having the Department of Commerce at the table with the Department of Environment (MDE). We are talking about a new industrial sector for Maryland. In South Carolina, staff promoting composting are housed in that state's Department of Commerce.
3. **Maryland Has Insufficient Capacity to Recycle Food Scraps:** More capacity is needed within Maryland to handle materials, particularly food scraps. The closing of the Peninsula composting facility in Wilmington, Delaware, underscores the need for MD-based operations. This bill is designed to stimulate investment in in-state capacity.
4. **Policies Are Needed to Expand Composting and Compost Use In Maryland:** Local and state policies are needed to overcome lack of infrastructure and other obstacles to compost expansion. MDE's newly promulgated – summer 2015 – permitting regulations for compost sites establish a clear regulatory path. This bill now focuses on the next logical steps: encouraging the building of facilities to meet those new regs. The task force will look at food waste recycling requirements in other states and how to strengthen Maryland's current disposal

ban on yard waste to encourage more recycling of this valuable material. Twenty-two states ban disposal of yard waste but Maryland's law is among the weakest as it only bans material that has already been separated from trash.

5. **There Is an Immediate Need to Reduce Biodegradable Materials Landfilled or Burned:** Landfills are a top source of methane, which is an extremely potent greenhouse gas in the short term. As a result, methane regulation has significant short-term potential to slow climate change. The best alternative to landfill disposal for biodegradable materials is not municipal trash combustors, which continuously emit carbon dioxide, but composting and anaerobic digestion. If we want to stem climate change, we need to act now.



Composting Makes \$en\$e

- ❖ Expanding composting = supporting made-in-America industry
- ❖ 1,400 new jobs could be supported for every 1 million tons of food scraps and yard trimmings converted into compost and used locally
- ❖ These jobs could pay \$23 million to \$57 million in wages
- ❖ Small-scale community-based composting works
- ❖ Composting sustains 2x more jobs than landfilling and 4x times more than burning trash (on a per-ton basis)
- ❖ Healthy soils need organic matter like compost

Pay Dirt:
Composting in Maryland to Reduce Waste, Create Jobs & Protect the Bay

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This bill does not put in place any requirements for food waste recovery. It will, however, bring pivotal stakeholders together, to develop a roadmap for how the state can best recover this valuable local asset to create jobs and healthy communities. It complements the development of new compost permit regulations finalized last year, as well as MDE's Zero Waste Plan that identifies diversion of organic materials as one of eight core priorities. This plan calls for disposal bans for organics and for universal recycling of organics.

About the Institute for Local Self-Reliance (ILSR): ILSR is a national nonprofit organization headquartered in Washington, DC. Since 1974 we have provided research and technical assistance on waste reduction, renewable energy, and other resource conservation issues to business, government, and citizens groups. We have worked in Maryland for decades to promote recycling-based businesses and jobs and prioritize waste reduction, reuse, and recycling over trash incineration and landfill disposal.