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Written Statement Submitted for the Record to the  
**Maryland House Environment & Transportation Committee**  
For the Hearing on  
**Department of the Environment – Yard Waste and Food Residuals Diversion and  
Infrastructure – Study (HB 171)**  
**February 8, 2017**

SUPPORT

*The opinions expressed herein are our own and do not necessarily reflect the views of The Johns Hopkins University.*

We are researchers at The Johns Hopkins Center for a Livable Future based within the Bloomberg School of Public Health, Department of Environmental Health and Engineering. The Center engages in research, policy analysis, and education activities guided by an ecologic perspective that views diet, food production, the environment, and public health as interwoven elements of a complex system. Recognizing the role that food waste reduction activities can play in supporting a healthier, more sustainable food system, **we support House Bill No. 171 – Department of the Environment – Yard Waste and Food Residuals Diversion and Infrastructure – Study.** Investigating and recommending ways to improve statewide capacity to divert food waste from landfills could improve the health and environment of Maryland communities.

In the United States, 30-40% of the food supply is wasted, while at the same time, 12.7% of Americans do not have enough food to support a healthy lifestyle.<sup>1,2</sup> Discarding food in a landfill squanders the natural, human, and economic resources needed to feed Americans, and eliminates opportunities to improve food security, enrich agriculture, and save money. Producing the amount of food wasted in the United States alone requires 300 million barrels of oil and more than 25% of all freshwater used by agriculture in the U.S. each year.<sup>3</sup> In 2010, it cost an estimated \$1.3 billion to landfill food waste.<sup>4</sup> When food is sent to a landfill instead of being eaten or recycled, it generates methane, a greenhouse gas that contributes to climate change and is 25 times more potent than carbon dioxide.<sup>5</sup>

In 2012, food scraps constituted an estimated 14.5% of Maryland's waste stream, but only 8.5% of those scraps were composted.<sup>6</sup> Reducing food waste can be achieved in many ways, such as reducing the amount of food that goes unused and is thrown away, donating unsold food from restaurants and grocery stores to food banks, or composting and anaerobic digestion. While the

Environmental Protection Agency's (EPA) Food Recovery Hierarchy and Maryland's Zero Waste by 2040 strategy both recommend prioritizing source reduction and recovery over composting, enhancing composting capacity and the infrastructure for food waste diversion in Maryland has many benefits. According to EPA, in 2013 recycling and composting kept 87 million tons of trash out of landfills, which prevented the release of 186 million tons of carbon dioxide equivalent emissions into the air – comparable to taking 39 million cars off the road for a year.<sup>7</sup> Properly composted food can be returned to the soil as a naturally nutrient-rich fertilizer, enhancing the capacity of sustainable agricultural production.<sup>8</sup>

Despite the potential benefits of composting, Maryland currently lacks the capacity to compost all of the food waste generated in state. By calling for the study and the recommendation of policies and initiatives that support infrastructure for food waste diversion, particularly those at large food waste-producing sites, HB 171 is a logical step toward building our capacity in state.

The proposed legislation will be a critical step in improving Maryland's capacity to divert thousands of tons of food waste from landfills. We encourage members of the Committee and all government, education, non-profit, and individual stakeholders recognized in the bill to continue to work toward a goal of managing solid waste through reduction, reuse, composting and recycling, and lastly through incineration and landfilling.

We applaud Delegate Robinson for sponsoring HB 171. Moving forward, policies that go beyond developing organic waste diversion infrastructure to support food waste reduction at all points on the Food Recovery Hierarchy can help guide the most health-promoting and environmentally sustainable approach to food waste management in Maryland.

Sincerely,

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## References

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<sup>1</sup> Buzby, J.C. Wells, H.F., Hyman, J. (February 2014). *The Estimated Amount, Value, and Calories of Postharvest Food Losses at the Retail and Consumer Levels in the United States, EIB-121*, U.S. Department of Agriculture, Economic Research Service. Retrieved from

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<sup>2</sup> Coleman-Jensen, A., Rabbitt, M.P., Gregory, C. & Singh, A. (September 2016). *Household Food Security in the United States in 2015*. USDA Economic Resource Service. Retrieved from <https://www.ers.usda.gov/webdocs/publications/err215/err-215.pdf>

<sup>3</sup> Hall, K.D., J. Guo, M. Dore, & C.C. Chow. (2009). The Progressive Increase of Food Waste in America and its Environmental Impact. *PLoS ONE*, 4(6).

<sup>4</sup> Buzby et al (2014).

<sup>5</sup> Environmental Protection Agency. (2016). Overview of Greenhouse Gases: Methane Emissions. Retrieved from <https://www3.epa.gov/climatechange/ghgemissions/gases/ch4.html>.

<sup>6</sup> Maryland Department of the Environment. (2014). *Zero Waste Maryland: Maryland's Plan to Reduce, Reuse and Recycle Nearly All Waste Generated in Maryland by 2040*. Pg. 15.

<sup>7</sup> Environmental Protection Agency. (2015). *Advancing Sustainable Materials Management: 2013 Fact Sheet*.

<sup>8</sup> Environmental Protection Agency. *Reducing the Impact of Wasted Food by Feeding the Soil and Composting*. (April 2016). Retrieved from <https://www.epa.gov/sustainable-management-food/reducing-impact-wasted-food-feeding-soil-and-composting>.