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**Committee: Health and Government Operations**

**Testimony on: HB91 “Fossil Fuel–Powered Lawn and Garden Care Equipment – State Purchase, Use, and Contracts – Prohibition”**

**Position: Favorable**

**Hearing Date: January 23, 2024**

The Maryland Chapter of the Sierra Club urges a favorable report on HB91. This legislation will prohibit the State from purchasing gas-powered lawn equipment and/or entering into or renewing a contract under which the contractor, or a subcontractor employed by the contractor, uses fossil fuel-powered lawn and garden care equipment for state projects beginning January 1, 2025. In addition, it will prohibit the State from using any fossil fuel-powered lawn and garden care equipment beginning January 1, 2030.

Gas-powered lawn equipment is a significant source of ozone-forming chemicals, carbon monoxide, fine particulates, and other toxic air pollutants and they generate CO<sub>2</sub> at a rate of three to nine times higher than electric powered equipment, thus contributing to the climate crisis. In California, gas-powered lawn equipment is a greater source of smog-forming emissions than all the cars across the state.<sup>1</sup>

A gasoline-powered leaf blower, for example, generates as much pollution in one hour as driving a 2017 Toyota Camry 1,100 miles, according to a 2020 California Air Resources Board study.<sup>2</sup> Using a leaf blower for less than 13 hours produces as much pollution as the average car driver in Maryland does in an entire year of driving.<sup>3</sup> A 2011 study by Edmonds showed that under normal usage conditions, a gas-powered leaf blower with a two stroke engine emits nearly 300 times the hydrocarbons of a pickup truck, 93 times the hydrocarbons of a sedan and many times as much carbon monoxide and nitrous oxides. The hydrocarbon emissions from a two-stroke leaf blower in a half-hour of yard work are about the same as a 3,900-mile drive in a Ford pickup.<sup>4</sup>

Nationwide, gas-powered mowers use over 1.2 billions gallons of gasoline; commercial mowers account for 35% of that figure as well as 100 million gallons of diesel fuel. A commercial mower uses an average of 2,000 gallons of fuel annually, whereas a car driving 12,500 miles annually uses 500 gallons annually.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> California Air Resources Board, CARB SORE Fact Sheet, <https://ww2.arb.ca.gov/resources/fact-sheets/sore-small-engine-fact-sheet>

<sup>2</sup> Ibid

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.policygenius.com/auto-insurance/average-miles-driven-by-state/>

<sup>4</sup> Kavanagh, Jason. December 5, 2011, Emissions Test: Car vs. Truck vs. Leaf Blower. <https://www.edmunds.com/car-reviews/features/emissions-test-car-vs-truck-vs-leaf-blower.html>

<sup>5</sup> Clean Cities Guide to Alternative Fuel Commercial Lawn Equipment, U.S. Department of Energy <https://afdc.energy.gov/files/pdfs/52423.pdf>

Founded in 1892, the Sierra Club is America’s oldest and largest grassroots environmental organization. The Maryland Chapter has over 70,000 members and supporters, and the Sierra Club nationwide has over 800,000 members and nearly four million supporters.

Further, the chemicals emitted from gas-powered lawn equipment have been linked to adverse health effects including cardiovascular disease, strokes, respiratory disease, lymphoma, leukemia, and other cancers, neurological disorders including autism, premature death and effects on prenatal development. There are also studies linking the emissions from gas-powered lawn equipment to harm of wildlife. A widely distributed, three-year study on bees demonstrated a significant impact to pollinators from air pollution like that generated by these devices.<sup>6</sup> The pollution causes them to pollinate less and less effectively.

The noise from gas-powered equipment is another adverse health impact harming both humans and wildlife. Most gas leaf blowers “impact the operator’s ears at 100 decibels or more” and according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, exposure to 100 decibels for just 15 minutes a day can lead to hearing loss.<sup>7</sup> Even for those nearby, an exposure at 80-85 decibels for two hours is enough to cause hearing damage. Workers are disproportionately affected and have little power to challenge use of this harmful equipment, despite the impact on their health, and are rarely provided with any protective hearing equipment as required by Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA).

Several states have passed legislation restricting or completely prohibiting all or some gas-powered lawn equipment including California and about 200 cities, towns and counties. Other states, such as New York, have passed legislation to encourage the transition to electric lawn equipment. Locally, Washington D.C. prohibited gas-powered leaf blowers in 2022 and Montgomery County has followed with its sales ban starting July 1, 2024 and a phase out for use effective July 1, 2025.

HB91 would help promote a transition to less polluting lawn equipment in Maryland and reduce greenhouse gas emissions. We urge a favorable report.

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<sup>6</sup> Anthropogenic Air Pollutants, Reduce Insect-Mediated Pollination Services, Environmental Pollution, 12 March 2022. <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0269749122000616>

<sup>7</sup> [https://www.cdc.gov/nceh/hearing\\_loss/what\\_noises\\_cause\\_hearing\\_loss.html](https://www.cdc.gov/nceh/hearing_loss/what_noises_cause_hearing_loss.html)