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Committee: Education, Energy, and the Environment
Testimony on: SB146 “Renewable Energy Portfolio Standard – Eligible Sources Alterations (Reclaim Renewable Energy Act of 2024)”
Position: Support
Hearing Date: January 25, 2024

The Maryland Chapter of the Sierra Club supports SB146. This bill will remove incineration of municipal solid waste (trash) from Maryland’s Renewable Portfolio Standard (RPS).

Electricity generation from trash incineration is a significant source of air pollution, water pollution, and greenhouse gas emissions. The Renewable Portfolio Standard was created to incentivize clean renewable energy and help Maryland transition away from polluting technologies. Trash incineration is neither clean nor renewable, and incentivizing this polluting technology is inconsistent with state goals and a waste of ratepayer dollars.

Trash incineration is not clean or renewable – it emits climate-disrupting carbon dioxide and other pollutants that cause serious damage to Marylanders’ health. Incineration facilities typically emit more carbon dioxide, dioxin, mercury, nitrogen oxide, and lead than fossil fuel plants. Their residual ash contains high concentrations of harmful toxins including dioxin, mercury, lead, and other heavy metals; these high concentrations can rapidly leach into local soil and water.

The trash incinerator in downtown Baltimore is the largest source of air pollution in the city, producing about a third of all industrial air pollution in Baltimore. It emits a substantial amount of mercury and lead – both known to be critical threats to children’s neurological development. It also is the city’s single largest source of pollutants that cause respiratory disease, sulfur dioxide and nitrogen oxides (NOx). Sulfur dioxide causes acute respiratory irritation, triggering immediate worsening for anyone with an underlying pulmonary disorder, such as chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD). Nitrogen oxides contribute to childhood asthma and are the major source of ground-level ozone (smog) formations that trigger asthma attacks.

The RPS should be focused on incentivizing new, renewable energy facilities that support Maryland’s efforts to mitigate climate change. Both trash incinerators in Maryland, which currently receive incentives through the RPS, began operations well before the RPS’s first compliance year, 2006. The Covanta incinerator in Dickerson, Maryland began commercial operation in 1995, and the Wheelabrator incinerator in downtown Baltimore began operation in

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.

the 1980s. Maryland's RPS dollars also have been supporting a Covanta incinerator in Fairfax County, Virginia, which began commercial operations in 1990. Subsidizing polluting facilities that existed before the RPS was created does not advance the goals of Maryland or serve its residents.

With the passage of the Climate Solutions Now Act, Maryland committed to an ambitious goal of reducing greenhouse gases by 60% by the year 2031. Governor Moore has committed to a goal of 100% clean renewable energy by 2035, and that goal was reinforced in the recent Maryland Climate Action Plan. Now it is time to align Maryland policy with its goals. The Sierra Club has long advocated that state policy should not incentivize any type of combustion. Removing trash incineration from the RPS is a critical step towards Maryland's long term clean energy goals.

For these reasons, the Maryland Sierra Club urges a favorable report on SB146.

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