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Committee: Environment & Transportation

Testimony on: HB387 “Pesticide Regulation – Transfer to Department of the Environment”

Position: Support

Hearing Date: February 9, 2022

The Maryland Sierra Club strongly supports this bill, which would move the responsibility of pesticide regulation from the Department of Agriculture (MDA) to the Department of the Environment (MDE). The bill would also encourage the MDE to consult with both the MDA and the Maryland Department of Health (MDH) and thus incorporate a wider perspective into the regulation of pesticides.

The term pesticides include herbicides, insecticides, rodenticides, and fungicides. These chemicals are toxic to plants, animals, and humans and may persist in the environment long after they are used for their intended purpose. For this reason, we need tight regulation in all areas where they are used, expanding beyond the agricultural domain. Pesticides are routinely used in parks, school grounds, golf courses, athletic fields, office buildings and grounds, and other locations too numerous to list here.

Shifting the authority to regulate pesticides to the MDE places the responsibility in a department that has both a broader scope of oversight as well as an expertise in toxic substances. The MDE already regulates hazardous substances and has the imperative to protect the state’s air, water, and land, where many of these pesticides end up.

Pesticides pose a significant public health problem. Human exposure to pesticides has been linked to cancer, reproductive disorders, and hormonal system disruption.¹ With this in mind, the MDH will provide invaluable input into the decisions about pesticide regulation.

In summary, by giving the MDE the overall responsibility to regulate pesticides in a more comprehensive way, while still retaining the ability to consult with the MDA and the MDH, we will realize benefits to the health of our ecosystems and ourselves. We request a favorable report on HB387.

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¹Environmental Protection Agency (November 4, 2021) <https://www.epa.gov/pesticide-science-and-assessing-pesticide-risks/human-health-issues-related-pesticides#what>