January 25, 2021

State of Maryland General Assembly
Environment and Transportation Committee
Room 251
House Office Building
Annapolis, Maryland 21401

Re: Support for HB264 Organics Recycling & Waste Diversion—Food Residuals

Dear Members of the Environment and Transportation Committee:

On behalf of the US Composting Council and its local chapter, the MD-DC Composting Committee, I am pleased to submit this letter of support for HB 264, a bill that would require large generators of food residuals to reduce and recycle those residuals.

This legislation:

1. Requires large-scale food waste generators (starting at two tons per week the first year) to source-separate food residuals if an organics recycling facility that has the capacity and is willing to accept food residuals exists within a 30-mile radius;
2. Gives facilities flexibility for how to avoid disposing of food waste. Instead of, or in addition to, sending food residuals to organics recycling facilities, they may: reduce waste, donate servable food, manage residuals in a system installed onsite, or divert food waste for agricultural purposes.
3. Gives generators covered by the recycling provision, an possible waiver based on cost or other reasonable circumstance.

The USEPA estimates 25% of the wastes generated in the United States are food residuals. This bill would benefit Maryland by encouraging the better management of its resources within the state and region, as well as providing jobs in a growing sector. Many food processors, institutions and other large-scale generators of food scraps – the law’s targets – want their food scraps to be rescued or otherwise beneficially used locally. Investment in and expansion of needed capacity to handle recycling of food scraps and other organics in Maryland would be spurred by this bill. Expanding composting and local compost use could support almost 1,400 new full-time jobs in Maryland, according to a 2013 study by the Institute for Local Self-Reliance. Expanding compost would support both new and existing compost facilities, but also support Maryland businesses that use compost for soil erosion control, stormwater management, green infrastructure, and other purposes.
Reducing food waste is a key component of the Goals and Measurement Recommendations from MDE associated with the Governor’s E.O. 01.01.2017.13 Resource Recovery Plan for Maryland. These goals recommend reducing food waste by 60% within the next 14 years. There are estimated millions of tons of food scrap generated in Maryland each year. This is an enormous task that will not happen on its own. This piece of legislation will help Maryland meet those goals.

The US Composting Council is a trade group comprised of compost manufacturers, advocates and affiliated businesses associated with the composting industry. Even though this is written as a organics diversion bill, there is potential that the compost manufacturing industry will be positively affected by the proposed regulation. Our members would be some of the food waste recyclers charged with processing material that would not otherwise be diverted by this bill. This would be a good unintended consequence of the bill. Compost is a soil amendment that has a wide range of benefits, including improving soil health, protecting against water pollution, limiting drought impacts, and assisting in soil remediation. It is also increasingly recognized for its climate protection benefits as it helps soils store carbon and reduce methane emissions from landfills. Current supply in Maryland of finished compost is limited by the number of manufacturers and in part by access to an adequate and reliable supply of raw material. This bill will encourage more small compost manufacturers to enter this specialty recycling market, adding competition, which will keep prices reasonable and reducing the need for the waivers that the bill authorizes.

The US Composting Council and its members in the Maryland-DC Chapter are pleased to support the passage of HB 264 and will be happy to work with friends and allies to assist in its passage and implementation.

Sincerely,

Frank Franciosi, Executive Director