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Senate Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee
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Senate Bill 655 – *Electronic Device Producer Responsibility Program – Established*
POSITION: SUPPORT

The Maryland State Medical Society (MedChi), the largest physician organization in Maryland, **supports** Senate Bill 655. Senate Bill 655 promotes a comprehensive extended producer responsibility program for the recycling and management of electronic waste ("e-waste") that holds electronic device manufacturers responsible for the full life cycle of their products, especially for recycling and safe disposal. Because of the ubiquity of electronic devices in modern life, e-waste is a rapidly growing waste stream and an increasingly challenging problem in our waste disposal system and for the environment. According to the World Health Organization, e-waste is one of the fastest-growing waste streams in the world. In Maryland, it's estimated that 20,000 tons of electronics are sent to landfills each year. The improper disposal of e-waste creates three problems: health risks, the waste of valuable resources, and fire safety concerns.

Hazardous substances that are released include lead, mercury, arsenic, polychlorinated biphenyls, hexavalent chromium, polyvinyl chloride, cadmium, flame retardants, selenium, and many others. These toxins can get into our soil, air, and water, leading to health problems, such as respiratory disease, neurological damage, miscarriage, cancer, etc. Like most exposures, the most vulnerable populations, including children, seniors, and those with pre-existing conditions, are at the greatest risk. Another major challenge is that lithium-ion battery fires are becoming increasingly common in Maryland. These fires and fumes are toxic and pose a risk to public and environmental health and safety.

In addition to numerous health risks, e-waste contains valuable metals and rare-earth elements, including gold, silver, copper, palladium, platinum, and cobalt. Discarding these is wasteful and costly. It is estimated that 150 million cell phones are discarded in the US each year. One million cell phones can yield 35,000 lbs. of copper, 772 lbs. of silver, 75 lbs. of gold, and 33 lbs. of palladium. Another example is that one laptop may contain approximately $13.46 in raw material value. When using raw materials, rather than recovered electronic components, the resource extraction and manufacturing processes can contribute to increased pollution and greenhouse gas emissions.

Maryland has had an e-waste recycling plan based on legislation enacted by the General Assembly (HB575/2005; HB879/2012). These plans have been a good start, but more is needed to keep e-waste out of the waste stream. Since 2014, manufacturers have contributed 6,522,300 pounds of e-waste recycling. By contrast, local governments have recycled 98,811,041 lbs., and the commercial sector (who are not manufacturers) has recycled 75,598,800 lbs. The fiscal and operational burden of this recycling activity falls to local governments, the vast majority of which fund it through local budgets and waste-disposal tipping fees.

Rather than continue to make local governments and taxpayers responsible for these costs, this legislation will shift the burden to the manufacturers of electronic devices. Doing so will result in substantial health, environmental, and safety benefits, as well as more effective management of the life cycles of electronic devices.

Senate Bill 655 builds on past efforts and moves the State forward by creating a practical and sustainable comprehensive program to more responsibly manage waste from electronic devices. On behalf of Maryland's physicians, MedChi urges a favorable report on Senate Bill 655.

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