

Almost a quarter of landfills in the United States are composed of food waste, from apple cores to half-eaten sandwiches to the tons of unopened food that gets dumped in the trash after every school lunch period. When this waste breaks down in the landfills, it produces greenhouse gases which greatly contribute to climate change. From this angle, Montgomery County school lunch periods are mass-scale factories that directly contribute to global warming. The scope of this issue is astounding. We've estimated that this food waste adds up to 420,000 pounds per year *just* from Montgomery County Public Schools. This fills up 27,000 trash bags every year. The amount of CO<sub>2</sub> released by schools' food waste is the same as burning 250,000 tons of *coal*.

We need to change the way we manage food waste. Compostology, a 501(c)(3) non-profit dedicated to reducing the amount of food sent to the landfills, has spoken with so many students and staff members from counties across the nation. The message is clear: youth and adults alike are tremendously worried for the future of this world. We are already seeing the horrific impacts of climate change, and lack of action will only make it worse. When surveying 15 school administrations, principals say that they *want* to start composting programs, as the environmental benefits are so clear. But, the funding and support they need are just not there. When students and teachers, invaluable members of the county, feel that the current system can't fulfill its fundamental purpose of preparing them for the future, that's a system that's *broken*.

Currently, the school system is not funding composting programs in schools because there is no government-run composting facility with enough capacity to support all of the food waste from Montgomery County Public Schools. With a government-run composting facility in Montgomery County, the school system has said that they will have composting pickup for the schools. Not only would this reduce the amount of food waste and contribute to greenhouse gas reduction, it would also teach students across the county the importance of sustainability and ways that they can adopt sustainable lifestyles going forward, empowering the next generation of leaders, scholars, and innovators to make choices in support of our environment. The county must pass Bill 15-25 so that we can save our world.