

Protect Workers, Uphold the Ban: Opposing Bill 19-25

To the Members of the Montgomery County Council,

As a Montgomery County resident who works from home, homeschools, and advocates for sustainable landscaping, I'm writing to express strong opposition to Bill 19-25. This exemption undermines worker protections, public health, and the environmental goals our county has worked hard to promote. Residents were told the ban would take effect July 1st. Companies had years to prepare, with county support and rebates. We cannot go backward now.

Today, gas-powered blowers expose workers to dangerous levels of noise and air pollution. They cause hearing loss, respiratory illness, and increase cardiovascular risk. Many of these workers can't advocate for themselves due to language barriers or fear of job loss. It is our duty to protect them—not to exempt the companies profiting from their harm.

We've seen this pattern before: unsafe factories, toxic materials, child labor—once accepted as “just business.” This ban is part of the same moral arc that removed lead from gasoline, banned cigarettes in offices, and required safety rails on scaffolding. We owe it to our workers—and our neighborhoods—to keep moving forward.

Gas blowers aren't just loud—they're physiologically damaging. Stress disorders, cognitive decline, heart strain, and delayed learning in children are all well-documented (*see Addendum*). In our neighborhood, the noise can continue for hours each day during the fall.

As someone who homeschools and works from home, I've experienced constant disruption, headaches, and the inability to concentrate, even with noise-canceling headphones. This is a public health issue.

The ban passed with public support and a clear implementation date. Council members told residents and businesses what to expect. Now, without meaningful public engagement, those rules are being changed at the last minute. The proposed exemption would gut the ban during its most critical months and invalidate the years of planning that led to it. This isn't just a policy reversal—it's a breach of public trust.

Montgomery County has a responsibility to protect its residents—workers, children, and communities—not just the convenience of a few companies. I urge the Council to reject this exemption and fully enforce the ban we've waited for.

Sincerely,

Emelin Ringuette
Gaithersburg, MD

Addendum: Documented Effects of Gas-Powered Leaf Blowers to Landscape Workers and Residents

Noise Levels & Hearing Damage

- CDC/NIOSH measurements place commercial backpack blowers at 95–106 dB(A) at the operator’s ear; even 50 ft away levels stay near 70 dB(A), above WHO’s 55 dB community limit. [1]
- A 2019 field study of two-stroke blowers found sound >100 dB at the machine and WHO-exceeding levels up to 800 ft away; low-frequency components dominated, making the sound harder to block indoors. [2][3]
- Prolonged exposure above 85 dB causes irreversible cochlear damage; landscapers therefore exhaust their safe daily noise dose in minutes without protection. [1]

Cardiovascular & Physiological Stress

- Environmental-noise reviews in Nature (2024) and WHO guidelines show chronic exposure above ~55 dB raises risks of hypertension, myocardial infarction and stroke via stress-hormone–driven vascular damage. [9][11]
- The CDC blog notes elevated cardiovascular morbidity among noise-exposed workers, citing NIOSH epidemiology. [1]
- Low-frequency blower noise raises cortisol and adrenaline in bystanders, increasing blood pressure and immune suppression. [7]

Cognitive, Developmental & Mental-Health Effects

- AAP policy (2023) stresses that children’s smaller ear canals amplify high-frequency sound and that infants cannot escape hazardous noise, making them uniquely vulnerable. [5]
- MRI study of 5- to 9-year-olds linked higher day-to-day environmental noise to thinner language cortex and poorer language scores. [6]
- Classroom experiments show 70 dB background noise (similar to a blower half a block away) reduces reading-comprehension accuracy and the amount of work adolescents attempt. [6a]
- Community surveys document annoyance, sleep loss and anxiety spikes from GLB noise; Santa Cruz CHASE reports measurable cortisol increases. [7]

Landscape Workers: Highest Risk Group

- Nearly 1 million U.S. workers in landscaping face routine noise over 85 dB; leaf blowers are the loudest tool measured. [1]
- Longitudinal studies of groundskeepers show elevated prevalence of permanent hearing loss and tinnitus, plus higher rates of hypertension compared with non-exposed workers. [1][4]

Why Children Need Extra Protection

- Pediatric guidance warns that if sound is “too loud” for an adult it is definitely too loud for a child; hearing loss risk is cumulative across the lifespan. [5]
- Chronic daytime noise above 55 dB is linked to slower reading acquisition, impaired attention, and long-term academic deficits. [6][6a]

References

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- [3] Quiet Coalition. “Gas Leaf Blowers’ Low-Frequency Sound Explains Broad Impact.” 2017. <https://quietcoalition.org/gas-leaf-blowers-low-frequency-sound-explains-broad-impact/>
- [4] NIOSH (Kerns E et al.). “Cardiovascular Conditions, Hearing Difficulty, and Occupational Noise Exposure.” *Am J Ind Med* 61, 2018.
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