

## TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF BILL 18-22, BANNING COMBUSTION ENGINE-POWERED LEAF BLOWERS

This testimony is being submitted in strong support of Bill 18-22, which would prohibit the sale and use of combustion engine-powered leaf blowers, and take other steps in support of such a ban.

The Council should enact the bill forthwith, for the following reasons:

■ **Combustion engine powered leaf blowers are causing serious harm to the health and well-being of county residents.**

According to a recent article in Harvard Medicine magazine, noise pollution drives hearing loss, tinnitus, and hypersensitivity to noise, and can also cause or exacerbate heart disease, diabetes, sleep disturbances, stress, mental health and cognition problems, and even low birth weight. In Europe, which has better data than the United States, chronic noise exposure contributes to an estimated 48,000 new cases of heart disease *each year*.

<https://hms.harvard.edu/magazine/viral-world/effects-noise-health>.

In my personal case, a one-time exposure to several extremely loud leaf blowers over a year ago has severely impacted my life by causing me to be acutely sensitive to everyday noise (a medical condition known as hyperacusis). The continued use of gas-powered leaf blowers by local landscaping companies causes me ongoing pain and discomfort and limits my ability to walk in my neighborhood or even remain in my house. But even for people who do not suffer as I do, gas-powered leaf blowers are a major threat to their health and well-being.

- **Minority groups suffer the most from noise pollution.** According to the Harvard Medicine article, “people in neighborhoods with low socioeconomic status and higher proportions of residents of color bear the brunt of noise pollution in the United States.” Moreover, this legislation will protect the hearing and general

health of people who work for landscaping companies, including workers of color.

■ **The legislation does not unduly burden landscaping businesses.**

First, many gas-powered leaf blowers that are being used by landscaping companies already violate existing Montgomery County noise ordinances. Using an app on my phone, I myself have measured the decibel levels when a landscaping company operated gas-powered leaf blowers near my house, and the readings were well in excess of that permitted by the existing county ordinance. My experience walking in adjacent neighborhoods confirms that the leaf blowers used by other landscaping companies are just as loud (this is based on my ear, rather than the app). The health and well-being of county residents outweighs the burden on landscaping companies to stop their already-illegal noise pollution.

Second, the bill would establish a reimbursement program to help defray the cost of battery-powered leaf blowers. This should alleviate the financial burden on landscaping businesses.

■ **The enforcement provisions of the bill are also crucial.**

Enforcement of the proposed ban is essential. As already noted, the existing noise limits in current law are not well-enforced. The bill would make it easier for an enforcement officer to issue a noise citation, based on a single noise complaint and photographic evidence of violation. I strongly support this provision. The county should also consider proactively sending out inspectors to monitor compliance with the ban even in the absence of a complaint.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify on this important matter.

Yoel Tobin  
Montgomery County, MD  
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