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## Testimony to Joint Committee on Environment, Natural Resources and Agriculture in support of

### H878/S517/S610 An Act to save recycling costs in the commonwealth

June 22, 2021

## Background:

The solid waste managers of our seventeen Member Towns have worked together as the South Shore Recycling Cooperative since 1998. Our Board enthusiastically supports this bill. Passage would provide relief to our increasingly stressed municipal program budgets by shifting the rising costs of recycling to those who profit from selling poorly- and overly- packaged consumer products.



Financial relief is needed now more than ever.

Massachusetts is racing headlong into a disposal crisis. We already **generate far more waste than we can manage**. By the end of the decade, we will be at the mercy of out-of-state disposal facilities for 1,310,000 tons/year of our municipal solid waste<sup>1,2</sup> if it remains at current levels. Rather than asking “Where will our waste go?”, we need to be asking “Where does it come from?”, “Why is there so much of it?”, and “Who should be paying to manage it?”.

In late 2017, we lost one-third of our recycling end markets to China’s National Sword embargo. We also lost the only recycled glass outlet in the state. Glass accounts for about 20% of our combined waste and recycling streams. Since 2018:

- the **cost of managing single stream recyclables** in our SSRC curbside towns has **quadrupled**. From an average of \$23/ton, it has fluctuated between \$60 and \$120/ton. For the 70,000 households served by our 7 curbside programs, that amounts to **over \$1.5 million/year** just for processing.
- The RISI and SMP index values of **paper**, the largest component of our recycling streams, were zero or negative from May of 2018 through March of 2020. Supply outweighed demand.

<sup>1</sup> MassDEP 2017 Solid Waste Data Update, Table 2;  
<https://www.mass.gov/files/documents/2018/12/11/17swdata.pdf>

- Recycling cost is now generally **on par with disposal cost** per ton.
- Even our eight drop-off programs, in which residents pre-sort recyclables, have gone from being **income generators to cost centers** due to the market contraction.

#### What fed this market crash?

- Ever-increasing sales of **single-use** and **not-quite-recyclable** products and packaging have created a **glut of waste material**.
- **Confusion** about what is actually recyclable, and “wish-cycling”, have **degraded the quality of recycling**, which was a major factor in China’s embargo.
- The misperception that **paper and glass** are benign alternatives to plastic are likely increasing the weight and reducing the value of our recycling streams. (This should also be considered when evaluating plastic product bans.)
- Private recycling companies became too reliant on China to buy our recyclables. Domestic markets couldn’t compete with Chinese companies’ buying power.
- There is still only **token use of recycled content** in products and packaging, so **supply of recyclables exceeds demand**. This is especially true for **paper**, which is **40%** of single stream recyclables.

#### Massachusetts trash generation exceeds our disposal capacity.<sup>2</sup>

- Most Mass. landfills will be closed by 2027, with no new facilities on the horizon. Landfills in nearby states are similarly squeezed.
- The seven waste-to-energy facilities will then be the only in-state disposal resources. And they require landfill space too: about 20% of the weight of the incoming trash (10% of the volume) is left as ash.
- Our **disposed tonnage has remained constant** for several years, despite efforts by municipalities and MassDEP to reduce it.
- We increasingly have to **rely on out-of-state landfills** to accept much of our wasted consumer products. This is a **precarious position** to be in.
- **Paper and packaging** make up **46% of our disposed municipal solid waste**<sup>3</sup>. This includes residential, commercial and institutional trash and recycling. It is the whole our recycling stream, and about **27% of our disposed tonnage**<sup>4</sup>.

Yet the increasing **cost of disposal and recycling is not reflected in the cost of the products**.

<sup>2</sup> 2030 Solid Waste Master Plan September 2019, MassDEP, Tables 3, 8 [https://www.mass.gov/doc/draft-2030-solid-waste-master-plan/download?\\_ga=2.115103111.1478367476.1624290479-1972427597.1617922688](https://www.mass.gov/doc/draft-2030-solid-waste-master-plan/download?_ga=2.115103111.1478367476.1624290479-1972427597.1617922688)

<sup>3</sup> MassDEP 2018 Municipal Solid Waste & Recycling Survey Responses, plus footnote 2

<sup>4</sup> MassDEP Summary of Waste Combustor Class II Recycling Program Waste Characterization Studies

Municipal governments, taxpayers, institutional and commercial generators **bear the entire cost** associated with managing these discarded materials, including collection, processing of recycling and incineration and landfilling of the rest, yet **have no control over their source**.

The US lags behind, but...

**Governments throughout the world** require producers of packaging, paper and other products to manage and pay for the collection, recovery and recycling of the materials they sell. This has resulted in changes such as **eliminating the unnecessary boxes for toothpaste**. These many changes add up to make a big difference in recovery and disposal.



Ten States, including **Vermont, Connecticut, New York, New Jersey and Maryland** are seriously pursuing similar producer responsibility laws. **Maine's** bill is on the Governor's desk.

## What does H878/S517/S610 do?

The purposes of this bill are to:

1. **Minimize the 9 figure costs** incurred each year by Massachusetts municipalities and other residential and school waste generators to collect, dispose of, and recycle post-consumer printed paper and packaging materials.
2. **Reduce toxicity, waste** and upstream emissions of **greenhouse gases and other pollutants**, and the environmental degradation of environmental justice communities.
3. **Increase the rate of recovery**, reuse and recycling of the covered materials, currently at 35%.<sup>5</sup> As noted, most recyclables end up in the trash.
4. Stimulate job and economic growth through the **development of local and domestic infrastructure** for reuse and recycling.<sup>6</sup>
5. Incentivize the:
  - a. **reduction of paper and packaging material use,**
  - b. **use of more recyclable and less environmentally destructive packaging materials, and**
  - c. **a more efficient and effective recycling system.**
6. Establish a **manufacturer financed system** to accomplish this.

It does so by:

- Establishing a multi-stakeholder **Sustainable Packaging Advisory Board**.

<sup>5</sup> Containers and Packaging: Product-Specific Data, EPA 2018 <https://www.epa.gov/facts-and-figures-about-materials-waste-and-recycling/containers-and-packaging-product-specific-data>

<sup>6</sup> Recycling and Jobs in Massachusetts, MassDEP/EBC NE 2012 <https://www.mass.gov/doc/recycling-jobs-in-massachusetts-skillworks-study-implementation-recommendations/download>

- Establishing a single **Producer Responsibility Organization**, which develops the Producer Responsibility Plan with the Advisory Board and administers the Program.
  - The Producer Responsibility Plan includes fee setting, funding and reimbursement mechanisms, a roadmap to 100% material recovery by 2035, litter abatement and packaging improvement, convenience standards, reporting, and public education.
  - Plans to build on and improve, but **not replace, existing infrastructure**, including municipalities, waste haulers and material recovery facilities, to maintain and expand convenience.
  - The fee structure incentivizes the design and use of less material, and less environmentally destructive packaging.
- Establishing the **Sustainable Packaging Trust**, which is overseen by MassDEP, funded by the PRO and assessed fines, and covers the costs of administration and enforcement.

Not only do our municipal governments, residential and school sectors need relief, so does our **atmosphere and biosphere**. The manufacture, transport and disposal of consumer products in the U.S. account for **29% of our greenhouse gas emissions<sup>7</sup>**, most which are generated elsewhere. Reducing the production and consumption of virgin materials, which **destroys habitat, pollutes air and water, and drives climate change**, is a necessary component of greenhouse gas reduction measures.

This is a bold and ambitious bill. **Bold ambition is what is needed right now.**

**We urge you to report H878/S517/S610 out favorably.**

Thank you for taking the time to read this testimony.

Respectfully submitted,



Claire Galkowski, Executive Director

South Shore Recycling Cooperative

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<sup>7</sup> Opportunities to Reduce Greenhouse Gas Emissions through Materials and Land Management Practices ", U.S. EPA, Fig. 3, September 2009