



Walter Wright, Jr.
wwright@mwlaw.com
(501) 688.8839

Strengthening Community Recycling Programs/Challenges and Opportunities: February 5th U.S. House of Representatives Committee on Appropriations Hearing

02/10/2020

The Subcommittee on Interior, Environment and Related Agencies of the United States House of Representatives Committee on Appropriations held a February 5th hearing titled:

Strengthening community Recycling Programs: Challenges and Opportunities ("Hearing")

Witnesses addressed a variety of issues associated with municipal, county, and regional operation of recycling programs.

Hearing witnesses and their key points included:

Ms. Elizabeth Biser, Vice President of Public Affairs, The Recycling Partnership

- Challenges include increased costs associated with certain recycling activities as opposed to disposal and landfill (referencing some communities paying twice as much to send materials to a Material Recovery Facility as opposed to a landfill)
- The quality (i.e., level of contamination) in recyclables is a critical issue
- Congress should support efforts to increase the quality of data collected on the nation's recycling system (noting markets work better with strong data)

The Honorable Daniel J. Corona, National League of Cities

- Discusses the history of modern recycling regulation (discussing the Solid Waste Disposal Act and subsequent amendments)
- Impact of China's National Sword Policy restricting imports of most plastics and other materials
- Local government responses to the National Sword Policy
- National League of Cities framework for advancing U.S. recycling system
- Promoting education and outreach
- Enhancing materials management infrastructure
- Strengthening secondary materials markets
- Enhancing measurement
- The federal government should:

- Develop policies that promote product stewardship and create incentives for manufacturers to design and produce products created with less energy, materials and toxins
- Create incentives for local governments and producers to develop systems to collect, compost, reuse and recycle products
- Promote material exchange markets
- Support research and development on conversion technology, packaging materials, biodegradability and techniques to minimize solid waste
- Support public participation and education programs to provide a better understanding of source reduction (reduce, reuse, recycle) and disposal options
- Promote the recycling of materials for federally funded projects.

Mr. Michael Gajewski, Managing Director, Closed Loop Partners

- Noting 40 investments by the company in companies and municipal projects in the United States assisting municipalities in avoidance of landfill disposal fees
- Recycling is the most cost effective option for the vast majority of American cities (discussing the economics)
- Recyclable commodities have a wide range of values
- Noting three innovations driving increased profit potential of recycling (referencing robotics/artificial intelligence, leadership by consumer brands, and depolymerization of plastic)
- Concern is expressed that too many products are not recyclable leading to consumer confusion causing contamination of the recycling stream

The Honorable Adam Ortiz, Director, Montgomery County Department of Environmental Protection

- Counties across the nation are highly diverse and vary immensely in natural resources, social and political systems, cultural, economic and structural circumstances, public health and environmental responsibility.
- Environmental stewardship is a primary function of county governments
- Key points from a county perspective:
- County governments play an essential role in the nation's recycling systems, as local governments are the primary provider of waste management services across the country.
- Due to tighter restrictions on recycled materials, counties have new challenges and opportunities to maintain recycling programs.
- Counties are taking innovative approaches to improve and sustain the nation's recycling systems.
- Additional federal guidelines and investments and early, consistent and meaningful engagement with intergovernmental partners are vital in the development and implementation of recycling standards, policies, programs and regulations.

The Honorable Peter Wright, Assistant Administrator for the Office of Land and Emergency Management, Environmental Protection Agency

- Discussion of United States Environmental Protection Agency ("EPA") recycling initiative titled America Recycles
- Discussion of national framework for advancing the U.S. Recycling System
- Recycling as part of the overall resource conservation and management and an important aspect of the nation's economic stability and protection the environment which is a priority for EPA
- United States recycling infrastructure is "outdated and ill-equipped to handle the diverse waste streams of today," causing consumer confusion
- Recognition of outreach and education to consumers and manufacturers is vital to the future of managing materials across the country
- Referencing EPA's focus on reducing food waste

A link to the witnesses' prepared testimony can be found [here](#).

