

To: Hon. Steve Englebright, Chair
NYS Assembly Standing Committee on Environmental Conservation
Hon. Todd Kaminsky, Chair
NYS Senate Standing Committee on Environmental Conservation

From: Solid Waste Association of North America, NY Chapter

Testimony Given by: Martin Bellew, Member of the Board of Directors

Date: October 21, 2019

**Re: Hearing to Examine Recycling-related Issues
Copy of Prepared Testimony**

On behalf of the New York Chapter of the Solid Waste Association of North America, SWANA-NY, I would like to thank the Committees for conducting this hearing on recycling and for providing our organization with an opportunity to address the Members. The current disruption to the recycling markets, which was set in motion by China's implementation of the National Sword policy, has reverberated across every sector of the solid waste industry, both in New York and throughout the United States, and we're grateful that these Committees are examining the status of the recycling markets and investigating alternatives to invigorate recycling in New York State.

First, please allow me to take a moment to tell you about who we are: SWANA-NY is an organization of more than 350 solid waste professionals committed to environmental stewardship and the advancement of sustainable environmental technology. Members of the New York Chapter represent all aspects of waste and materials management and come from state and municipal government agencies, private companies, engineering, legal and financial consultants, as well as private citizens with an interest in advancing the state's materials management practices. We are a chapter of SWANA, an international non-profit organization of more than 10,000 members, which is now the largest member based solid waste association in the world.

As I'm sure you'll hear throughout the day, the number one challenge facing Material Recovery Facilities, both public and private, since the implementation of China's restrictive import policies, is reducing contamination and processing the cleanest recyclables possible. The first step toward this goal begins with education and changing public behavior.

New York State and the Department of Environmental Conservation should consider spearheading a statewide campaign focused on instructing residents and businesses on recycling practices designed to keep contamination at a minimum. Many municipalities have already shifted from an emphasis

on recycling more to an emphasis on “recycling right”. This includes discouraging the practice of “wish-cycling”, when New Yorkers place items they believe should be recycled, such as plastic bags, in their recycling bin, and instructing residents to throw it out when you’re in doubt. Residents and businesses should be encouraged to contact their local municipality or hauler, or visit the municipal website for accurate information on what can and cannot be included with their recyclables. Re-education on recycling practices will play a vital role in reducing contamination. For that reason, strong consideration should be given to increasing the amount of grant funding to municipalities for recycling education over the 50% that is now available. While the list of acceptable recyclables varies from municipality to municipality, a statewide educational campaign should focus on the need to keep curbside recyclables clean and contamination free. SWANA-NY has participated in the recycling stakeholder meetings conducted by DEC throughout the state over the past year. Some progress has been made on formulating a social media-based public service campaign highlighting what to recycle and what not to recycle. However, DEC admittedly lacks the funding to launch a large-scale public service campaign. We urge the Legislature to provide funding earmarked for such an initiative.

The second step toward reducing contamination is upgrading and retrofitting MRFs with the latest technology for sorting recyclable materials. While New York State already provides reimbursement grant funding for recycling equipment purchases made by municipalities, reimbursement is capped at \$2 million and municipalities must wait a considerable amount of time for reimbursement. Presumably, many more municipalities would be in a position to pursue retrofit projects if funding were made available up front. Providing tax relief or other incentives for retrofitting private facilities should also be considered. In addition, we recommend the Legislature and the Cuomo Administration contact Members of New York’s delegation in the U.S. House of Representatives and Senate, and urge them to include funding for recycling in any Infrastructure bill that is introduced this year.

Of course, cleaner recyclables will only get us so far. In order to counteract the market contraction that was caused by China’s new policies, we’ll need to expand our domestic recycling markets. The state should incentivize the development of recycling facilities within New York and investment in the expansion and refurbishment of existing infrastructure. In the 90’s New York City’s Economic Development Corporation helped the Visy Paper Mill, now the Pratt Paper Mill, secure tax-exempt loans, and find a site in Staten Island near water and power sources. The City agreed to provide a guaranteed tonnage of paper and the mill agreed to pay a floor price. On the state level, we can look to California, where the Recycling Market Development Zone program provides incentives to attract and enhance businesses that use materials from the waste stream. Last year, it was announced that the program would be providing a low interest loan to Pinnpack, a company that reclaims PET and converts it into thermoformed packaging, which will allow it to purchase and install equipment that will boost manufacturing speeds and reclaim additional materials. Incentives must be established to attract recyclers to New York and to develop and expand our in-state recycling options.

Other initiatives that would relieve some of the recycling burden faced by our municipalities should also be explored. This includes a thorough review of Product Stewardship initiatives and Extended Producer Responsibility initiatives, including shifting the cost of recycling packaging and printed paper back to brand owners. For far too long, these companies have externalized the cost of waste disposal of containers and packaging onto local governments and their private sector partners. Consideration should also be given to expanding the NYS bottle bill to include wine bottles, distilled spirits and other glass beverage containers that are not currently captured under the law. However

when considering an expansion to the bottle bill, the state should be sensitive to the economic impact on existing MRFs and take a renewed look at what is currently included in the bill to determine if that needs to be re-evaluated. Materials like aluminum and PET bottles are valuable commodities to MRFs and may be better suited as a curbside collected item than a deposit material. Whereas, curbside collected glass often does not get recycled, has virtually no market value and can damage MRF equipment. To that end, New York State should consider measures to expand the use of glass as a road construction aggregate, thereby creating a local market for this material

For the many municipalities across the State that are currently formulating next year's budget, the recession in the recycling market is being deeply felt. While we won't be able to solve these problems in one day, SWANA-NY greatly appreciates your attention on these issues, and looks forward to working with the Committees and other legislative leaders, the Cuomo Administration, and other recycling stakeholders, to address the challenges facing recycling here in New York.

Thank you.