



Committee: Environment & Transportation

Testimony on: HB0036-- “Environment – Packaging, Containers, and Paper Products – Producer Responsibility”

Organization: Takoma Park Mobilization Committee
Person

Submitting: Diana Younts, co-chair

Position: Favorable

Hearing Date: February 9, 2021

Mr. Chairman and Members of the Committee,

Thank you for allowing our testimony today in support of HB0036, a bill that will complement Montgomery County’s Zero Waste Plan and Climate Action Plan by, among other things, incentivizing packaging producers to introduce less waste in to the waste stream and by disincentivize them to extract virgin fossil fuels to create their packaging.

The Problem: Under the current system for recycling, taxpayers and local governments bear the cost of managing and recycling waste and the entire system has become unmanageable and unsustainable. There are limited or no incentives for brands and producers to use recycled content, it is often cheaper for them to extract virgin fossil fuels to create their packaging than to use recycled goods, the vast majority of plastic waste is not recyclable, and the vast majority ends up in landfills, incinerators, and litters our communities and waterways. As a result, greenhouse gases and toxic pollutants are generated when the packaging is created, transported, and disposed, and the costs and burdens are borne by all except the producers.

The Solution: HB0036 shifts the responsibility for post consumer waste from taxpayers and municipalities to the companies that produce the packaging. It requires producers of packaging and paper to help local government cover the costs of collecting, transporting, and recycling these products and through fees, incentives producers to meet recyclability standards and environmental design criteria and to disincentive them from producing materials with limited end of life management options. The bill also requires producers of covered products to submit a product stewardship plan to MDE (the Maryland Department of the Environment) and provides for clear, standardized education to consumers about recycling.

Extended Producer Responsibility is not a new concept and has been in existence around the world for as long as 30 years in some places and many of the multinational companies are already subject to EPR laws like HB0036. These systems successfully shift costs of managing recycling from taxpayers to the producers and increases recycling rates to well over 50% and is an important means of preserving natural resources.

Extended Producer Responsibility is:

More Effective: Producers of packaging materials would have a direct economic incentive to produce packaging that can easily and profitably be managed by municipal recycling programs. And our communities would have an economic incentive to maintain robust recycling programs that no longer creates a tax-burden.

More Sustainable: Our current approach to recycling is not resilient to changes in the global recycling market. Because our communities must budget for recycling, when costs rise unexpectedly we may be forced to stop or restrict our program. EPR is an insurance policy for our communities when global recycling markets fluctuate.

More Equitable: Communities and taxpayers currently pay millions per year to manage packaging waste. Meanwhile, more and more disposable and wasteful packaging is entering the market every day because producers have no incentive to design less wasteful packaging. This leaves us all unfairly footing the bill for a problem we did not create. It is also a major contributor to the burgeoning toxic pollutants disproportionately burdening disadvantaged communities.

For these reasons we urge you to vote favorably for HB0036.