



St. Vincent de Paul Society of Lane County

PO Box 24608, Eugene OR 97402 (541)687-5820

Thursday Feb. 23 2017

Maryland House Economic and Transportation Committee

Subject: HB1070 Department of the Environment – End-of-Life Management of Mattresses Study

Greetings:

We are pleased to share our experience with regard to mattress recycling as Maryland considers funding a study of this useful tool for waste diversion and job creation. St. Vincent de Paul Society of Lane County set up the first financially viable mattress recycling facility nationwide when it opened DR3 in Oakland, CA in 2000. This was long before stewardship laws incentivized the process. Since then, the agency has opened two more mattress recycling facilities, one at our headquarters in Eugene, OR, and a second facility just outside of Sacramento.

Our three facilities process well over 300,000 mattresses annually and employ 50 people. Besides deconstructing mattresses, we also create pet beds from some of the material and we refurbish mattresses, covering old mattress springs with new foam and fabric and selling those refurbished beds at an affordable price in the communities where we operate thrift stores.

In our opinion, landfilling mattresses is not much different from throwing away money and jobs. The embodied energy of the materials in a mattress – the still-usable steel, foam, fabric and wood – have value in the commodities markets.

Because we are a nonprofit with a social services focus, we are different from for-profit recyclers who often seek to automate their systems as much as possible. While automating may reduce costs, it also, in our experience, reduces the recycling rate as automated systems often end up damaging the materials to the degree that they have no value in the secondary markets and wind up being landfilled.

At our California processing facilities we achieve a 90 percent recycling rate, which is higher than the overall state rate for mattress recycling.

We make these jobs available to people who face barriers to employment, such as recent incarceration. In fact, the operations manager at our Woodland CA facility was a head of household receiving TANF benefits when he started as a general worker in summer 2015. A year later, he was promoted to his current position overseeing a crew of 18. We have many such success stories among the workers in our materials management businesses.

In addition to mattress recycling, we operate 15 retail thrift stores, an appliance repair and recycling facility, a glass foundry that converts old window glass into art and architectural glass, a used car lot, a Styrofoam recycling project, and a fashion upcycling division. We divert about 100 tons of

materials daily in our operations. We employ close to 600 people and about half of our annual budget comes from our materials management businesses. We use those funds to help pay for four homeless shelter programs, emergency services that help thousands of residents every month, wrap-around support programs for the people living in our 1,300 units of affordable housing, job training and help for homeless veterans and their families. We are the largest social services agency in our county.

Ample research confirms that waste diversion creates more jobs than landfilling or incineration. Besides helping states meet their zero waste goals, mattress recycling also reduces greenhouse gas emissions, according to research conducted on behalf of the state of California.

Oregon does not currently have a stewardship law on the books, but we have worked with solid waste officials in several counties to set up systems to keep mattresses from their landfills. These systems work where counties own the landfills and are willing to pay a fee to keep mattresses out. In communities where tip fees are low or there is no interest in extending the life of the landfill, it can be more difficult to set up a functional program without stewardship legislation.

Please feel free to reach out to us if we can be helpful in the discussion about best ways to implement mattress recycling.

Regards,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Susan Palmer". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Susan" and last name "Palmer" clearly distinguishable.

Susan Palmer
Economic Development Director
St. Vincent de Paul Society of Lane County
www.svdp.us