



THE PRINCE GEORGE'S COUNTY GOVERNMENT

OFFICE OF THE COUNTY EXECUTIVE

BILL: House Bill 307 – Environment - Packaging Materials
- Producer Responsibility

SPONSOR: Delegate Lierman

HEARING DATE: February 2, 2022

COMMITTEE: Environment and Transportation

CONTACT: Intergovernmental Affairs Office, 301-780-8411

POSITION: SUPPORT

The Office of the Prince George's County Executive **SUPPORTS House Bill 307 – Environment - Packaging Materials - Producer Responsibility** that will encourage manufacturers to make more sustainable packaging choices and contribute to the skyrocketing costs – currently borne by taxpayers alone – of collecting, recycling and disposing of that packaging. In addition, it will spur the development of a waste diversion industry in Maryland and assess current and future waste infrastructure needs across the State.

Extended producer responsibility (EPR) is a valuable tool to maximize the circularity of packaging materials while reducing the amount of waste being generated. It engages private enterprises to become active participants in the promotion of reduce, reuse, and recycle practices. Prince George's County led the state in recycling and waste diversion for well over a decade and is home to the largest municipal composting facility on the east coast. This Bill will augment the County's current efforts to decrease the amount of waste being landfilled and leverage limited taxpayer funds to continue to innovate, providing the best and most sustainable services to residents. Recycling must be a shared responsibility between manufacturers and the public so that municipal waste becomes socially and financially manageable.

EPR for packaging shifts costs of recycling from taxpayers and local governments to producers of packaging and requires producers to make smarter packaging choices. Over the course of the pandemic, the amount of waste collected from residents has increased dramatically. Items for home use are packaged in smaller sizes than for commercial users (for example, compare a home roll of toilet paper to the industrial variety) and with the demand for home-delivery increasing, there are more shipping boxes and protective layers of packaging than ever. The increased waste has strained

our collection, diversion, and landfill system, and the pandemic has limited our outreach to residents regarding how to reduce their consumption, reuse, or donate items, and most sustainably dispose of their waste. As we emerge from the pandemic, the burden of these increased costs and the need to re-focus on community education is limiting our ability to provide new and better services to our residents. Experts in solid waste do not expect residential waste to return to pre-pandemic levels without the implementation of significant policy change, and the cost of dealing with this waste is unsustainable for local governments without an increase in revenues. With the manufacturers contributing their fair share, and committing to utilizing more sustainable materials, we will be able to reduce the burden on residents and taxpayers to fund this essential service.

This Bill can also stimulate the development of new waste diversion industries within the State, creating more reliable markets for recycled content while Maryland residents benefit from new investments, industries, and jobs. Despite the County's investment in advanced recycling technology including an Optical Sorter, that allows us to bundle highly consistent pallets of specific plastics, we are unable to find reliable markets for Polyvinyl Chloride (#3 plastic), Low-Density Polyethylene (#4 plastic) and Polystyrene (#6 plastic). As a result, we have been at times forced to landfill these items as "residue". The lack of a local market for Low-Density Polyethylene means the County cannot responsibly invest in the technology necessary to accept plastic bags and film plastic, because the period to offset that investment is too long, and the risk of those items slowing down processing or damaging our existing machinery is too great. Residents must take those items to a private entity for collection, or send them to the landfill. This bill has the potential to spur creative entrepreneurial solutions that will benefit the Maryland economy and the planet- bringing jobs, investment and a reliable local market for recyclable materials.

For the reasons stated above, the Office of the Prince George's County Executive **SUPPORTS House Bill 307** and asks for a **FAVORABLE** report.