



THE MARYLAND HOUSE OF DELEGATES
ANNAPOLIS, MARYLAND 21401

HB 31 – Truth-in-Labeling

Chair Barve, Vice Chair Stein, Members of the Environment and Transportation Committee:

In this Committee, we work hard to pass legislation that protects Marylanders and our environment from the detrimental impact of plastics. We've passed bills to encourage recycling, improve our recycling processes, and, ultimately, reduce our State's overall plastic waste. At the same time, however, our state law is requiring companies to mislead Marylanders about the recyclability of plastic containers.

For decades, we have associated the three chasing arrows in a triangle with recyclability. Many of us intentionally buy products that have that symbol, believing we are buying something recyclable. But it's not true. Under current law, a plastic container or bottle must be labeled with a number - the Resin Identification Code - placed within three arrows forming a triangle. This requirement was a result of industry lobbying long ago. While consumers believe it means the container is recyclable, all it really means is that the plastic is of a certain type; some of that type is recyclable, numbers 1 & 2 in particular – but most are not. According to the recycling coordinator for Wicomico County Solid Waste Facility, "The ubiquitous recycling emblem found on product packaging... has become one of the most misunderstood messages to consumers."¹

HB 31 would put a stop to this inaccurate labeling and ensure that Marylanders are being told the truth when it comes to what is recyclable and what is not.

Here are the facts: in 2018, at least a third of all recycling² in the United States ended up in landfills or incinerators. In 2019 in Montgomery County alone, 51,736 tons of non-recyclable material were thrown into recycling bins.³ That's about 50% of non-recyclable materials thrown into the wrong bin. For the County that has the highest recycling rates in the State, this is extremely concerning. Additionally, we know that for every six tons of waste that goes through Waste Management's recycling sorting facility, at least 1 ton of the waste isn't recyclable in the first place. In Baltimore County alone, 32% ends up in landfills.⁴

¹ <https://www.delmarvanow.com/story/news/local/maryland/2022/03/09/maryland-recycling-heres-what-actually-ends-up-landfills/9341916002/>

² <https://www.epa.gov/facts-and-figures-about-materials-waste-and-recycling/national-overview-facts-and-figures-materials>

³ https://www.montgomerycountymd.gov/DEP/Resources/Files/procurement/RFI-DEP-RRM-10_11_21b.pdf

⁴ <https://www.baltimoresun.com/news/environment/bs-md-recycling-20180618-story.html>

“Aspirational” recycling, or “wishcycling,” creates a problem in our recycling system; people put items in the bin that they think – or hope – are recyclable, thus contaminating other items that would have been recyclable. This then adds costs to the County, and thus to us, the taxpayers.

By ensuring that consumers know whether or not something is *truly* recyclable, HB 31 will allow consumers to make informed decisions about the products they buy. It will cut down on the amount of items improperly put in the recycling bin, and in doing so, decrease taxpayer money spent sorting and cleaning out the unrecyclable materials where possible.

For these reasons, I respectfully request a favorable report on HB 31.