

April 15, 2024

Representative Rick Hansen
Chair, House Environment and Natural Resources Finance and Policy Committee
407 State Office Building
St. Paul, MN 55155

Re: H.F. 3911, Environment and Natural Resources Supplemental Finance and Policy Omnibus Bill

Dear Chair Hansen and Members of the House Environment and Natural Resource Finance and Policy Committee,

The Partnership on Waste and Energy (Partnership) is a Joint Powers Board consisting of Hennepin, Ramsey and Washington counties, formed to address waste management and energy issues. The Partnership seeks to end waste, promote renewable energy and enhance the health and resiliency of the communities we serve while advancing equity and responding to the challenges of a changing climate.

The Partnership appreciates the opportunity to express support for several provisions of H.F. 3911 that will have significant impact on protecting public health and the environment and help counties be more successful in reaching challenging statutory waste management goals.

Packaging Waste and Cost Reduction Act

The Partnership strongly supports inclusion of the Packaging Waste and Cost Reduction Act in this bill. Counties are working very hard with our cities, recyclers, residents and businesses to keep as much waste out of landfills as possible. Counties spend four to five times more on recycling efforts than we receive in state funding through SCORE grants. Cities raise tens of millions of dollars annually in taxes and fees to operate their recycling programs. Even with all this, the state's recycling rates have been stuck at around 40-45% for many years, resulting in 3 million tons of materials managed as trash each year.

We need to get the state out of "business-as-usual" and get us to the next level to meet state recycling mandates and zero waste ambitions. Resources that could be recycled or composted are instead creating mountains of trash in our landfills.

The provisions in this Act will:

- Hold packaging and paper product producers accountable to help fix the waste problem they have created.
- Build on the state's recycling collection and processing infrastructure, with the producers responsible for the waste, not taxpayers, funding the gaps where we lose recyclables now.
- Increase statewide access to reuse, recycling and composting programs.
- Reduce the financial burden on individuals and taxpayers for recycling services.
- Incentivize redesign of packaging to make them reusable, recyclable or compostable.

Other Provisions We Support

Multifamily composting grants: The Partnership supports expanding opportunities for residents to participate in composting. Metro counties will not meet the state mandate of 75% recycling by 2030 without significant diversion of organic materials from trash. A third of Partnership residents live in apartments and other multifamily buildings. Partnership counties provide technical, logistical and financial resources to building owners and residents to help them address challenges they face and ensure composting efforts are successful. The Partnership supports the proposed grant program so county efforts can have greater reach and engage more partners.

Clean lighting: The Partnership supports reducing the hazards to public health and the environment posed by products that contain mercury. Restricting the use of mercury in lighting is an important risk reduction solution for homes and businesses, as well as in county household hazardous waste collection programs that handle mercury-containing lighting products.

Boat wrap product stewardship: The Partnership supports engaging manufacturers in creating a program to keep boat wrap out of landfills and offer consumers convenient recycling and reuse options, all without burdening taxpayers. The Partnership appreciates that local government is specifically included in stakeholder consultation during stewardship plan development.

Critical materials recovery task force: Electronic waste must be kept out of the mixed municipal solid waste stream and disposal facilities to reduce waste toxicity, to prevent risks to the environment, public health and facilities and to recover valuable products and critical materials for reuse and recycling. The Partnership supports efforts that strengthen systems to recycle electronic waste. We also appreciate that counties will be represented on the Critical Materials Recovery Task Force by the Solid Waste Administrators Association.

Tree removal and planting funding: The Partnership supports funding for tree removal and planting, particularly through the Community Tree Planting grants detailed in the bill. This offers funds that resource-strapped communities need now as emerald ash borer destroys community forests and urban canopy in a growing number of counties (50 and counting).

Repealing the “bag ban”: The Partnership supports local authority to implement policies and activities consistent with the state’s waste management hierarchy and solid waste plans. Repealing Minn. Stat. Sec. 451.9998 would restore that local authority as it regards the use of merchant bags in their jurisdictions. It would allow local governments an option to restrict the use of certain bags to reduce waste and prevent negative impacts to land, water, wildlife and public health from littering.

Provisions We Support With Concerns

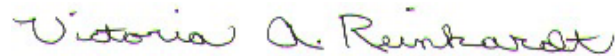
Food and food waste hierarchy: The Partnership shares the state’s priority on addressing food waste. It is critical to prevent food from becoming waste and manage what is discarded using strategies that best reduce impacts on the climate and keep food out of landfills. The Partnership appreciates the recognition in the proposed food and food waste hierarchy provision that anaerobic digestion to produce valuable biogas and digestate products is an important climate protection and landfilling reduction strategy, and as such it is placed on the same level as composting. However, we advise against establishing a duplicate hierarchy within the state’s highest waste management policy declaration in 115A.02. Doing so can create confusion and potential misalignment with implementing the long-standing waste management hierarchy.

RE: Support for H.F. 3911, House Environment and Natural Resources Supplemental Finance and Policy Bill

Sustainable Aviation Fuel: The Partnership has previously supported legislation creating pathways for the use of biomass, in particular organic wastes, for the production of clean transportation fuels such as sustainable aviation fuel. The provision regarding credit certificates for fuel derived from biomass appears to be written without regard to the broad types of renewable and recurring organic matter listed in the definition of “biomass” in Minn. Stat. Sec. 41A.15, subdivision 2e. The provision should be revised to not impede the availability of credit certificates for sustainable aviation fuel derived from organic materials such as trees, wood, wood waste, wood residues, and organic portions of solid wastes.

Thank you for the opportunity to present the Partnership’s positions on H.F. 3911. We stand ready to work together on these important issues for the benefit of our communities and the state.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in green ink that reads "Victoria A. Reinhardt".

Commissioner Victoria A. Reinhardt, Ramsey County
Chair, Partnership on Waste and Energy