



September 27, 2021

The Honorable Thomas Carper  
Chairman  
Committee on Environment & Public Works  
United States Senate  
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Shelley Moore Capito  
Ranking Member  
Committee on Environment & Public Works  
United States Senate  
Washington, DC 20510

**RE: The Circular Economy as a Concept for Creating a More Sustainable Future**

Dear Chairman Carper and Ranking Member Capito:

The Solid Waste Association of North America (SWANA) commends the Senate Environment and Public Works (EPW) Committee for holding the September 22 hearing, “The Circular Economy as a Concept for Creating a More Sustainable Future.” SWANA is the largest professional association for the solid waste and recycling industry in the United States, with more than 10,000 members in 47 chapters. We are committed to advancing from solid waste management to resource management. Our members include both local government officials and private sector representatives in all fifty states.

Building a true circular economy is a pressing issue and your leadership is invaluable. China’s National Sword policy disrupted recycling in America and abroad, but it also served as a wake-up call. New ways of thinking are necessary to ensure that recycling remains economically and environmentally sustainable now and into the future.

The recycling industry supports over half a million jobs throughout the United States. Recyclables are a critical source of raw materials for U.S. manufacturers and greatly reduce the environmental impact of extracting and processing raw materials into finished products. Recycling can and should play a significant role in the United States’ economic growth and Climate Change commitments.

In order for these benefits to be realized, the federal government must provide ongoing support to municipal recycling programs. More than 100 local curbside collection programs across the Nation have suspended or reduced operations over the past three years, primarily due to issues of cost and contamination, both of which can be addressed through federal investment.

SWANA supports and applauds the inclusion of the RECYCLE Act (S.2941) into the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (H.R. 3684) and urges its passage, but more is necessary. The RECYCLE Act provides \$75 million over five years to support consumer recycling education and outreach, but there are more than 9,000 curbside recycling programs in the United States and 330 million Americans living in 140 million different households. SWANA research suggests that it costs about \$1 per household per year to effectively communicate about recycling. This means at least \$150 million is needed just for education.



As I mentioned during the September 13 EPW Roundtable, “Investing in Recycling Infrastructure and Curbing Waste Stream Contamination,” it is simply not realistic to expect local governments to bear these costs on their own. Cities and counties have limited resources, and when they choose between hiring more teachers or improving recycling education, they inevitably choose the former. Similarly, when the choice is between increasing pay for police or buying new recycling carts, law enforcement usually comes first. Recycling is critical infrastructure and deserves appropriate federal support.

Helping to support recycling education and outreach is one concrete way that the federal government can support municipal programs. Reducing the public’s confusion around recycling is another. Senator Merkley’s example of the “recyclable and renewable” claim on paper plate packaging he encountered at a hotel in Erie, Pennsylvania is a great example of how difficult it can be for consumers to make the right choices. More attention is needed on recycling claims made by producers. Millions of well-intentioned Americans put the wrong items in the recycling bin because of this confusion. The contamination that results has a real dollar and cents impact on programs. It costs more to clean-up the material and what is left is then worth less because of the contamination.

SWANA understands the challenges facing municipal recycling in the United States because our members are the stewards of those programs in every state. We urge the Committee and their Senate colleagues to continue their efforts to bring recycling into the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Transitioning to a circular economy is vitally important to protecting human health and the environment and must be thought of as an essential part of the Nation’s infrastructure.

The final question asked to the four witnesses at the September 22 hearing was “what specific policy initiative should we consider?” SWANA’s response is simple: the amount of annual funding for recycling-related purposes needs to be increased from \$15 million to at least \$150 million. Such funding would provide a meaningful opportunity for hundreds of local governments, include many smaller communities that have suspended curbside recycling programs in recent years, to revitalize, improve, and expand their recycling programs.

SWANA thanks the Committee for inviting our association to participate in the September 13 Roundtable and for holding this important hearing. We look forward to working with Committee members to build upon it and improve our Nation’s recycling system. If you have any questions about municipal recycling or the contents of this letter, please do not hesitate to contact me at [dbiderman@swana.org](mailto:dbiderman@swana.org)

Sincerely,



David Biderman  
Executive Director & CEO



cc: The Honorable Benjamin L. Cardin  
The Honorable Bernard Sanders  
The Honorable Sheldon Whitehouse  
The Honorable Jeff Merkley  
The Honorable Edward Markey  
The Honorable Tammy Duckworth  
The Honorable Debbie Stabenow  
The Honorable Mark Kelly  
The Honorable Alex Padilla  
The Honorable James M. Inhofe  
The Honorable Kevin Cramer  
The Honorable Cynthia Lummis  
The Honorable Richard Shelby  
The Honorable John Boozman  
The Honorable Roger F. Wicker  
The Honorable Dan Sullivan  
The Honorable Joni Ernst  
The Honorable Lindsey Graham

