



DATE: March 26, 2014

TO: Members of the House Environmental Matters Committee

FROM: Leslie Knapp, Jr.

RE: Senate Bill 781 Environment – Recycling – Special Events

The Maryland Association of Counties (MACo) offers the following information regarding Senate Bill 781.

As amended, the bill would require permits for special events involving 200 or more people to be conditioned on the organizer of the event to recycle. Counties must update their recycling plans by October 1, 2015, to include special event recycling.

As introduced, SB 781 included far more onerous requirements on county governments, including mandatory commercial recycling and single stream curbside pick-up for residential areas. MACo opposed the bill in its original form but is not opposing the bill as amended. However, MACo does wish to voice its ongoing concern about the formulation of recycling policy in Maryland.

Unlike most other states, Maryland requires the counties to administer recycling programs and reach certain recycling goals. Despite originally being an unfunded mandate from the State, counties have supported recycling and now Maryland ranks above average among recycling states. Both MACo and the counties are committed to recycling.

Additionally, recycling is a primary component of the zero waste concept, which MACo also believes is worthy of consideration. While MACo supports recycling and has previously supported or not opposed certain recycling legislation, MACo has opposed recycling bills that would impose new and potentially costly mandates on county governments rather than have the affected stakeholders work collaboratively to create achievable recycling goals. As introduced, SB 781 would have imposed such a mandate.

Recycling mandates often do not consider the administrative, cost, and enforcement challenges created by the new mandates or the existing capabilities of different regions throughout Maryland to achieve those mandates.

MACo has received direction from its Land Use Subcommittee, which is part of MACo's decision-making body and considers environmental issues such as recycling, to reach out to key stakeholders over the 2014 interim to work on five key policy areas to improve recycling efforts. The areas include: (1) composting of yard and food waste; (2) consideration of emerging gasification technology; (3) special event recycling; (4) commercial and retail recycling; and (5) improved coordination and recycling reporting with municipalities, higher education institutions, and other major institutions. MACo has already made preliminary inquiries to the Maryland Department of the Environment, the waste haulers, and zero waste and recycling advocacy groups and has received favorable responses.

If Maryland is to further its recycling or zero waste goals, MACo believes that the most prudent approach would be to bring the appropriate stakeholders together over the 2014 interim (and beyond if necessary) to craft a collaborative and realistic approach to increasing recycling. Otherwise, both the State and the counties will be left to continue to grapple with ill-conceived mandates that do not acknowledge local challenges or provide the resources necessary to ensure success.