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July 12, 2011

Chairwoman Anne M. Gobi
Joint Committee on Environment, Natural Resources and Agriculture
State House, Room 473F
Boston, MA 02133

Chairman Marc R. Pacheco
Joint Committee on Environment, Natural Resources and Agriculture
State House, Room 312-B
Boston, MA 02133

Re: Testimony in Support of H234, Recycling in Multifamily Buildings

Dear Chairwoman Gobi, Chairman Pacheco, and Members of the Committee,

Thank you for providing this opportunity to offer our comments on H234: An Act to increase recycling, which would require recycling in multifamily dwellings. We wish to express our strong support in favor of H234.

The Sierra Club is the oldest and largest non-profit, non-partisan organization environmental organization in the country. With over a forty year history in this chapter, the Massachusetts Sierra Club represents about 22,000 members and supporters throughout the state and 1.4 million nationwide. We fight for clean air, clean water, the preservation of the Commonwealth's most precious natural spaces, and healthy, vibrant communities.

The generation of municipal solid waste (or household trash) is major environmental problem in the United States. The volume of trash produced has steadily increased in the past decades, from 88.1 million tons (2.7 lbs. per person per day) in 1960 to 254.1 million tons (4.6 lbs per person per day) in 2007[1]. Massachusetts residents produce even more waste than the national average – in 2006 the state produced around 12 lbs per person per day[2]. Disposal of all this waste is costly can lead to air and water pollution as toxins leach out of landfills[3]. Decomposition in landfills also creates greenhouse gases, accounting for 36% of methane gas emissions in the United States[4].

Recycling household materials such as aluminum, glass, plastics and paper is widely recognized as one economical solution to our growing waste problem. The collection and processing of recyclables is generally cheaper then waste disposal, particularly in highly-populated New England. For example, in 2000, the town of Concord, MA paid $56/ton to dispose of waste but only $11/ton to recycle commingled containers, as well as gained revenue from paper recycling[5]. Recycling programs also create far more jobs per ton than waste disposal programs[6].

In addition, recycling provides many environmental benefits, such as reduced energy demands and greenhouse gas emissions: it takes 20 times as much energy to produce an

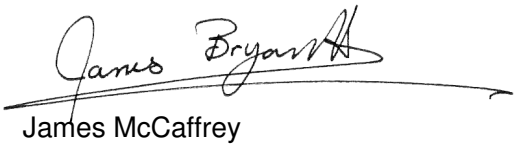
aluminum can from mined ore than from recycled aluminum[2]. Recycling helps conserve natural habitats, clean air and water by reducing landfills[1]. In 2004, recycling in Massachusetts alone reduced greenhouse gas emissions by over 2 million metric tons, saved enough energy to power over 800,000 homes for one year and saved over 3 million cubic yards of landfill space[7].

Despite the many demonstrated benefits of recycling, recycling programs in the United States have yet to reach their full potential. In 2007, only 55% of paper waste, 24% of glass waste and 22% of aluminum waste was recycled. State and local governments can and should do much more to encourage citizens to recycle. Recycling programs in multi-family buildings often lag behind those for single-family residences, partly because recycling can be less convenient in large buildings that do not provide space for the separation/storage of recyclables[8]. Multiple studies have shown that people are far more likely to recycle when provided with convenient recycling programs at their home or office[9]: for instance, just increasing the number of recycling containers available in two mobile home parks increased paper recycling by 52%[10].

While most municipalities have local ordinances that require that owners of multi-family dwellings supply adequate recycling access, in reality, these local ordinances have no "teeth" and are typically openly flaunted. The low recycling rates in Boston, Springfield, and Lowell are clear evidence for the need for appropriate state regulation and enforcement authority.

The bill, H234, would thus greatly increase the number and convenience of recycling programs available to residents living in multifamily buildings. This would expand the many economic and environmental benefits Massachusetts currently gains from its recycling programs[7], including further reductions in our greenhouse gas emissions and environmental pollution. Therefore, the Sierra Club strongly supports the passage of H234, and we hope that this bill is reported favorably by the committee and is supported by all the members of the Senate and the House of Representatives.

Respectfully,



James McCaffrey
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Massachusetts Sierra Club

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