



RE: IN STRONG SUPPORT OF BILL 83

TO: The Honorable Erica Perez, Chair of the Environmental Management Commission

Thank you Chair Perez for ensuring that the commission fulfills its duty to address matters referred to it by the county council in a timely fashion. We are greatly encouraged by the professionalism with which the EMC has been discharging its duties under your leadership, and we acknowledge the efforts made by your fellow commissioners, who have shown themselves to be equally committed to resolving the serious waste related public health issues we face as an island community.

In our own efforts to address the public health and environmental crisis created by a proliferation of plastic consumption and wastage, Recycle Hawaii has been active at every possible level, from engaging in the Global Plastics Treaty negotiations convened by the United Nations to manning sort stations at local events. Our organization's commitment to provide leadership on this issue continues to send me across the globe, and throughout these travels I make it a point to ask those I meet, those who are not in town for the same reason I am, those who are serving me food or giving me a lift to the airport, if they "know about plastic." In some ways what I am about to share is encouraging, in other ways it is tragic. Not a single person answers, "no."

Everyone. . . from the Uber driver that has just arrived in Canada from Afghanistan under a program that protects those who supported the U.S. war effort there, to the person printing out my boarding pass at the Seattle Airport, to the Gen X'er wearing plastic elf ears at the Renaissance Faire. . . everyone I ask knows that plastic is invading our bodies and fouling our planet. And while they might be shocked to learn that gum is made of plastic, or that they are consuming microplastics every time they drink from a PET water bottle, they are fully aware that plastic pollution represents a serious health crisis. What they don't know is what can be done about it.

What can be done about it is what we are doing here and now. Bill 83 is what we can do about it. It's what you can do about it. The result of the concerted effort being made by environmental and social justice organizations, as well as government agencies that have not been captured by the fossil fuel and plastics industries, is a deep and broad agreement that the only solution to plastic pollution is a steep reduction in plastic production and consumption. . . at least 75%. Bill 83 represents an effective strategy to reduce global demand for plastic by eliminating usages for which convenient and affordable alternatives to fossil fuel plastic exist.

While we are fully aware that bioplastics come with their own environmental impact, these impacts pale in comparison to the damage being done by toxic microplastics, which is why we support the usage of bioplastics as a transitional material until other nontoxic and environmentally sound materials can effectively displace them.

It is important here for us to address the widely shared misconception that compostable food ware cannot be managed outside the landfill until the county builds a commercial composting facility. This assertion undermines progress towards achieving our plastic pollution reduction and compost proliferation goals primarily because it is based on an untenable presumption that bioplastics are an inalienable component of the organic resource stream, but also because there are other ways to break down BPI-certified bioplastics. This can be done in in-vessel composting machines, or by shredding these materials and adding them to piles that are raised to a high enough temperature. Further, the most promising substitute for bio- and fossil fuel plastics, PHB, is backyard compostable and doesn't need any special treatment. PHB is the material the black AirCarbon straws found at many local restaurants and hotels throughout the state are made from. Finally, there is a great deal of innovation in this space around food ware made from natural materials like leaves. Hawaii is well positioned to create a cottage industry in response to demand for these products which are readily composted through low tech approaches via a network of community-scale composting operations.

Hawaii Island is home to a robust, albeit informal, network more than capable of composting the materials generated when Bill 83 passes, especially those materials generated at events, which is going to be the frontline for the bill's impact. Through our own EPA funded program in Ka'u, students have diverted about 20,000 pounds of organic materials. Organics do not have to end up in the landfill, they can be composted here, now. Passage of the bill will compel the county to collaborate with those actively engaged in diverting organic materials in ways that formalize their activities.

Clearly the public and the private businesses impacted by the bill's passage will need support. Recycle Hawaii is prepared to provide that support. We have submitted a proposal to the R&D Impact Grant that would establish a model, small scale community based composting operation in District 5. We will once again apply for a Waiwai Grant that would fund the direct provision of such services and subsidies to event organizers and businesses as they move towards compliance with the bill's provisions.

Mahalo for your efforts to advance the cause of eliminating plastic pollution. We ask that the commission submit a favorable recommendation to the council regarding passage of Bill 83.

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