



May 28, 2021

Joint Committee on Municipalities and Regional Government
Massachusetts State House
24 Beacon St.
Rooms 504 & 540
Boston, MA 02133

RE: S.1332/H.2158 An Act encouraging municipal recycling and composting

Dear Chairs Cronin and Ehrlich, and members of the Committee:

The Massachusetts Food System Collaborative is pleased to offer this written testimony in support of S.1332/H.2158 An Act encouraging municipal recycling and composting, and to make suggestions for strengthening this bill to increase food waste diversion in the Commonwealth. The Collaborative is a network of Massachusetts food system organizations, working to promote, monitor, and facilitate implementation of the Massachusetts Local Food Action Plan.

Reducing food waste is one of the priorities of the Massachusetts Local Food Action Plan. According to the Massachusetts Department of Environmental Protection, food waste and other organic material make up approximately 21 percent of the total waste stream in the state, equaling 950 thousand tons a year in Massachusetts in 2019. At the same time, more than 650,000 Massachusetts residents are food insecure, making the disposal of edible food a missed opportunity to better synthesize and strengthen multiple sectors of the food system. Food waste poses an environmental hazard as well, as discarded organic materials in landfills create methane, a greenhouse gas which contributes to climate change. And landfilling or incinerating food waste is expensive for municipalities and has public health and environmental impacts.

Addressing food waste through increased diversion at the municipal level is a key component of increasing sustainability and addressing a number of the Commonwealth's environmental goals, such as reducing greenhouse gas emissions, increasing generation of electricity through renewable resources, and building healthy soils. This bill would require every municipality to establish a diversion or recycling program for many materials, including compostable waste. We support this goal.

We recommend that the requirements proposed by this bill be supported by educational and other resources to support waste diversion. Composting at the municipal level should be encouraged after exhausting opportunities for higher impact approaches outlined in the EPA's food recovery hierarchy, including encouraging reduction of waste at the source, diverting excess edible food to households in need, and turning appropriate organic waste into animal feed.

Municipalities should provide guidance and support to businesses to reduce their food waste by employing measurement practices that can inform adjustments to their ordering and production patterns. Boards of health should provide guidance about the benefits and best practices around donating edible food to food rescue organizations as well as encourage schools to divert edible food to other students via share tables or to the community via food rescue. Towns and cities should deploy educational campaigns to encourage residents to adjust their food purchasing and preparation behaviors with an eye toward waste reduction.

After these steps are taken, the remaining food scraps should be composted or diverted to anaerobic digestion facilities. Municipalities should provide the infrastructure and incentives to ensure that this diversion is easy for residents and businesses.

There are many approaches to encouraging food waste diversion, and there are many models already in place in Massachusetts. Some urban and suburban municipalities have curbside food waste collection. A few towns provide that service alongside trash and recycling collection so residents need not pay extra to participate in the program. Many other towns encourage residents to sign up for food scrap collection from a private company and some towns have a preferred vendor agreement with a collection business. Many rural and suburban towns offer a place for residents to drop-off their food scraps at the transfer station, while others offer a drop off option at a farmers market, community garden, or other location.

Towns can also incentivize people to compost in their backyards through offering equipment, including compost bins and kitchen scrap buckets, at a discounted price, and support the efforts through disseminating information online or in print. To further support composting, municipalities can encourage schools to compost and can source local compost for landscaping projects.

State resources and guidance will help expand these efforts, and encourage more municipalities to participate. Requirements, such as those proposed in this bill, will help significantly reduce the amount of organic materials sent to landfills, helping to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and increasing the production of electricity through anaerobic digestion as well as of nutritive soil amendments through composting. Applying these requirements statewide will also help to support environmental justice, by ensuring that these efforts are supported equitably, rather than only in more well-resourced areas.

We appreciate the Committee taking up this issue, and urge you to further consider it in the context of Massachusetts' food system as a whole. The Plan, which provides that context, is available at <http://mafoodsystem.org/plan/>, and the Collaborative is available to provide additional information and connections to practitioners and advocates who can offer further details, at the pleasure of the Committee.

Thank you very much for the opportunity to provide this testimony.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'Winton Pitcoff', with a long horizontal line extending to the right.

Winton Pitcoff, Director