



RHODE ISLAND

DEPARTMENT OF ENVIRONMENTAL MANAGEMENT

OFFICE OF THE DIRECTOR

235 Promenade Street, Room 425
Providence, Rhode Island 02908

March 4, 2025

The Honorable Joseph M. McNamara
Chairman
House Committee on Education
82 Smith Street
Providence, Rhode Island 02903

RE: H 5422 An Act Relating to Education – School Waste Recycling and Refuse Disposal

Dear Chairman McNamara,

Thank you for providing the Department of Environmental Management (DEM) the opportunity to comment on H 5422, which would institute new requirements in K-12 schools intending to reduce food waste, promote local sources of food, and enhance recycling. DEM does not currently have the resources to implement this legislation as proposed.

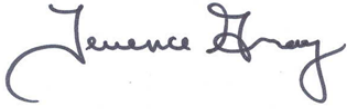
H 5422 would expand the state's current food waste ban to require that all K-12 schools ensure that all organic-waste materials generated by the school are recycled at an authorized composting facility or anaerobic digestion facility. Similarly, it would require that all organic-waste materials generated by higher education or research institutions be recycled at an authorized composting facility or anaerobic digestion facility effective on January 1, 2028. The legislation would also require that K-12 schools provide share tables for students, faculty, and staff to share unused food with others. It also would require each school to have at least one environmental custodian certified by DEM, in coordination with the Rhode Island Resource Recovery Corporation, in the fundamentals of composting and recycling.

DEM finds the idea to train school staff in the basics of composting and recycling worthy of further consideration, but we are concerned the bill does not provide resources to implement this requirement. The team at DEM that would likely be responsible for the implementation of this requirement is very small and because we are not aware of similar programs in other states would need to craft a curriculum and other necessary materials from scratch. Therefore, we do not believe that we can implement this legislation with existing resources.

We also note that there is an incorrect statutory citation in the existing food waste ban. R.I. Gen. Laws § 23-18.9-17(d) uses the term "educational entity" and references a definition found in R.I. Gen. Laws § 16-110-1. However, this citation is incorrect, and the statute should instead reference R.I. Gen. Laws § 16-111-1.

We appreciate the opportunity to offer comments on this legislation and would be pleased to make ourselves available as needed. Please feel free to contact Ryan Mulcahey, DEM Director of Legislative Affairs, at ryan.mulcahey@dem.ri.gov should you have any additional questions or wish to discuss this matter further.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read "Terrence Gray". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Terrence" being more prominent than the last name "Gray".

Terrence Gray, P.E.
Director

cc: Members of the House Committee on Education
The Honorable Lauren Carson
Nicole McCarty, Esq., Chief Legal Counsel to the Speaker of the House
Lynne Urbani, House Policy Director