

Dear Chairman DiPalma and Members of the Senate Finance Committee,

I urge you to support S2441 to create a Compost Fund, for two main reasons: economics and ecology. There is a major economic concern for Rhode Island municipalities, as with so many others across the US, whose solid waste disposal fees are increasing as landfills near capacity. S2441 would add a \$2-per-ton surcharge on solid waste to bend this cost curve. Paying a little more now can save us a lot of pain down the pike. With a Compost Fund aggregating and returning that surcharge to municipalities and community organizations, we can invest in the infrastructure necessary to manage organic waste intelligently and extend the life of our landfill. Food scraps are the heaviest component of the solid waste stream, so municipalities that effectively divert this material from the landfill will quickly see reductions in their tipping fees.

From an ecological perspective, food scraps should not be considered waste. They are chock-full of the nutrients withdrawn from the soil when growing our food. We need to return these nutrients to the soil, so that we can grow more food, and so that our farmers are not as reliant on increasingly expensive fertilizer imports. As an added bonus, keeping organic material out of the landfill greatly reduces methane emissions, which can help slow climate change.

You may hear arguments in favor of a process to “digest” organic waste and turn it into fuel. That’s a sub-optimal way to handle food scraps, because it’s expensive to maintain and operate, and the “digestate” that is left at the end of this process is not nearly as good for our soils as compost is. To be sure, anaerobic digesters can be part of a healthy waste-processing ecosystem. But they don’t take the place of compost producers, who make a high-value soil amendment, nourishing Rhode Island farms and making more good jobs for Rhode Islanders in the process.

Some may suggest that we can put off worrying about the landfill’s capacity and just cross that bridge when we come to it. But it’s no simple task to change how people deal with food waste. We need the physical infrastructure to collect food scraps, process them into compost, and get that material back to our farmers. We need the social infrastructure of knowledge and behavioral change, since there is a learning curve for people to start separating their food scraps from trash. All of this takes time to develop.

Fortunately, we have municipalities and organizations across the state that are well positioned to undertake this work. They are already doing an impressive amount to innovate and build out our compost infrastructure. With the support of a Compost Fund, we will encourage even more innovation at the local level, finding different strategies that work to reduce our solid waste stream and improve our soils at the same time. Please give your support to S2441. Thank you.

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