

Racial Equity and Social Justice (RESJ) Impact Statement

Office of Legislative Oversight

EXPEDITED FULL UPGRADE OF EXISTING RECYCLING CENTER BILL 23-21: COMPLEX

SUMMARY

The Office of Legislative Oversight (OLO) expects Expedited Bill 23-21 to have a positive impact on racial equity and social justice in the County.

BACKGROUND

The County Council enacted Expedited Bill 23-21 on June 29, 2021. The bill increases the capital budget for the County's existing Materials Recovery Facility from \$18.1 to \$20.4 million. The total budget for the facility will fund state-of-the-art equipment upgrades that will increase the facility's capacity, safety and efficiency. The upgrades will allow the facility to:

- Increase its commingled processing capacity from 80 tons per day to 200-240 tons per day;
- Increase its storage capacity for both incoming and baled material; and
- Use advanced technology to sort dangerous materials such as glass and nails to improve the screening process.

Expedited Bill 23-21 will also reduce the number of staff needed at the facility, from 55 contract workers to 20 to 35 contract workers.¹ Expedited Bill 23-21 will add the following to Montgomery County Law:

- To authorize the planning, design, and construction of the Full Upgrade of Existing Recycling Center Complex (P802201) project in the Rockville area.²

DATA AND ANTICIPATED RESJ IMPACTS

Research suggests that recycling has a positive effect on the environment by lowering greenhouse gas emissions, reducing landfills, reducing energy consumption, and lowering pollution levels.³ Research also suggests that recycling disproportionately benefits communities of color because pollution and climate change harm them. For example, communities of color disproportionately benefit from the favorable impact of recycling on landfills because their neighborhoods are more likely to be located near landfills.⁴ Communities of color also disproportionately benefit from efforts to reverse climate change because they are more vulnerable to the health impacts of climate change.⁵

Of note, People of Color (Latinx, Black, Asian, and Other Race persons) account for 55.5 percent of County residents while White, non-Hispanic residents accounted for the remaining 44.5 percent of County residents.⁶ As such, while County residents overall will benefit from increased recycling capacity of the Materials Recovery Facility, a majority of County residents as persons of color could experience even greater benefits from recycling and that narrow disparities in health, economic and other outcomes associated by race and ethnicity.

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Yet, persons of color, and Latinas in particular who account for a majority of the Materials Recovery Facility workforce,⁷ could experience disproportionate harm by 36 to 70 percent reduction in contractor positions associated with facility upgrade. The impact of this significant loss in contractor positions on racial equity and social justice will be partially offset by improved working conditions at the facility that will favorably impact remaining staff.

Overall, OLO anticipates the bill will favorably impact racial equity and social justice in the County. The disproportionate benefits of recycling on communities of color will offset the harm associated with the loss of contractor positions at the Material Recovery Facility currently filled by people of color.

CAVEATS

Two caveats to this racial equity and social justice impact statement should be noted. First, predicting the impact of legislation on racial equity and social justice is a challenging, analytical endeavor due to data limitations, uncertainty, and other factors. Second, this RESJ statement is intended to inform the legislative process rather than determine whether the Council should enact legislation. Thus, any conclusion made in this statement does not represent OLO's endorsement of, or objection to, the bill under consideration.

¹ FY21-26 Capital Improvements Program – Recycling and Resource Management, Transportation and Environment Committee, Montgomery County, Maryland.

https://www.montgomerycountymd.gov/council/Resources/Files/agenda/col/2021/20210512/20210512_14.pdf

² Montgomery County Council, Expedited Bill 23-21, Full Upgrade of Existing Recycling Center Complex, Introduced on June 15, 2021, Montgomery County, Maryland.

³ Benefits of Recycling, National Institutes of Health <https://nems.nih.gov/environmental-programs/Pages/Benefits-of-Recycling.aspx>

⁴ Robert D. Bullard, et. al, Toxic Wastes and Race at Twenty 1987-2007: A Report Prepared for the Christ Justice & Witness Ministries, March 2007. http://d3n8a8pro7vhmx.cloudfront.net/unitedchurchofchrist/legacy_url/491/toxic-wastes-and-race-at-twenty-1987-2007.pdf?1418423933

⁵ The Impacts of Climate Change on Human Health in the United States: A Scientific Assessment, U.S. Global Change Research Program, 2016, <https://health2016.globalchange.gov/>

⁶ Montgomery Planning, Montgomery County Trends: A Look at People, Housing and Jobs Since 1990, January 2019 https://montgomeryplanning.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/01/MP_TrendsReport_final.pdf

⁷ Communication with OLO Senior Legislative Analyst Elaine Bonner-Tompkins based on her October 23, 2019 site visit to the Shady Grove Transfer Center with the 2020 Leadership Montgomery CORE Cohort.