

January 15, 2016

The Honorable Sylvester Turner  
Mayor, City of Houston  
P.O. Box 1562  
Houston, TX 77251

Dear Mayor Turner,

As one of our country's largest, most diverse and thriving cities, we must recognize that the environmental initiatives supported by our local government serve as models for the world and should represent the very best practices available.

The undersigned organizations call on you to set high standards for the environmental initiatives that Houston supports, and to especially promote best practices in recycling, composting, and waste reduction that are designed with scientific review and community input. We specifically urge you to support a Zero Waste Plan in Houston that contributes to quality of life, environmental justice and new jobs in a sustainable economy.

We believe that a circular or "closed loop" economy is one in which natural resources are re-used sustainably and ethically, reducing waste and eliminating the presence of hazardous substances in our environment that threaten human health. Waste is frequently a by-product of inefficiently designed goods and processes that externalize costs to the environment, local governments and taxpayers.

A linear pattern of production and consumption of natural resources cannot be sustained; we must transition to a circular economy where resources are conserved and recycled. This is what we mean by "Zero Waste."

Cities across the world including in Texas are already taking a leadership role in building the circular economy through what the U.S. EPA calls "Sustainable Materials Management." A key element of the circular economy includes Zero Waste infrastructure that allows communities to participate in recycling, composting and reuse of materials. Cities can help this infrastructure develop by offering services, encouraging businesses to participate and passing proven policies that have working models in place all over the world.

**Zero Waste typically starts with a city-wide, measurable goal to divert 90% of waste from landfills and incinerators.** Major cities around the world have committed to achieving Zero Waste goals in the next few decades, and it is time for Houston to do the same!

The Houston region has too many landfills and these are liabilities to our future, the environment and the communities that live near them. Run for profit, corporate-owned landfills rely on ever increasing wastefulness. We cannot allow our public dollars to support this polluting and unsustainable industry. We should continue to develop recycling and composting programs now, and work with the state legislature to

remove incentives and loopholes for landfills. In doing so, we can protect our air and land while growing jobs and innovation in the recycling and composting industry.

Not all alternatives to landfills are an improvement, however. The previous administration pursued a misguided plan to abandon separated curbside recycling in favor of a mixed waste processing proposal coupled with polluting technologies such as gasification or pyrolysis. Recyclers and recycling advocates oppose the "One Bin" plan because it would promote wastefulness, contaminate resources and lead to incineration technologies such as refuse derived fuel, pyrolysis or gasification.

Houston must commit to promoting technologies that are proven to be effective at conserving resources' highest and best use and reducing pollution – not those that create new sources of toxins in the environment and our air, especially in communities already burdened with pollution. We urge you to abandon the "One Bin" concept for good.

We recognize that Houstonians live in a time and place impacted by climate change. Climate change and social inequality are a double threat to our city, as pollution disproportionately impacts public health in low income and diverse areas. The people of Houston deserve better; therefore, our city should serve as a model for environmental justice and initiatives that promote a clean environment, health as well as racial equity. Zero Waste commitments can serve us in this regard.

Houston can be on a path to create thousands of good paying jobs in our region, support local businesses and make our city cleaner, greener and healthier for all. To start, it's time to set a Zero Waste goal to divert up to 90% of waste from landfills and incinerators and implement a Zero Waste Plan that succeeds in the coming decades.

As our mayor, please commit to supporting a Zero Waste goal and a Zero Waste Plan for Houston.

Sincerely,

Melanie Scruggs, Houston Program Director, Texas Campaign for the Environment

Robert Mele, President, Teamsters Local Union No 988

Mary Schultz, member, Sierra Club Houston Regional Group

Sandy Spears, Group Leader, 350.org

Dr. Robert Bullard, Dean of the Barbara Jordan-Mickey Leland School of Public affairs, Texas Southern University

Juan Parras, Executive Director, Texas Environmental Justice Advocacy Services

Dr. Jacqueline Smith

CC: Houston City Council members