

**CITY OF PHOENIX PUBLIC WORKS DEPARTMENT**

**Statement for the Record**

**U.S. House of Representatives Committee on Appropriations**

**Subcommittee on Interior, Environment and Related Agencies**

***Hearing on “Efforts to Address Marine Plastic Pollution Through Recycling”***

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**Ginger Spencer  
Public Works Director  
City of Phoenix**

Chairwoman Pingree, Ranking Member Joyce, and Members of the Subcommittee, thank you for the opportunity to submit a statement into the official hearing record for the U.S. House of Representatives Committee on Appropriations Subcommittee on Interior, Environment and Related Agencies.

The City of Phoenix is the fifth largest City in the United States with a population of 1.5 million people and spans 519.7 square miles and is currently the fastest growing city in the country. The City of Phoenix pursues excellence throughout the organization and delivering quality, efficient, and cost-effective services to Phoenix residents is the cornerstone of our commitment to public services. The City of Phoenix recognizes that we must focus on the well-being of residents, a strong economy and a healthy environment, and embrace a full approach to sustainability. It is our responsibility to provide leadership and demonstrate commitment through innovative and efficient policies that assure clean land, air and water, and improve working and living environments. We're a vibrant, growing city and a great place to live, work and play.

The City of Phoenix has a Council-Manager form of government where Mayor Kate Gallego serves as the 62<sup>nd</sup> Mayor of Phoenix and Ed Zuercher serves as the City Manager/Chief Operating Officer of the city responsible for policy implementation and day-to-day operations. Mayor Kate Gallego took office on March 21, 2019 and is fully committed to diversifying the economy, strengthening infrastructure investment, and working to make Phoenix a leader in sustainability. Mayor Gallego is passionate about building a Phoenix that works for everyone and increasing the quality of life for all Phoenixians.

The City of Phoenix Public Works Department is the fourth largest city department behind police, fire, and water and is responsible for the management of solid waste, fleet, facilities, and flood control operations. The Public Works Department's solid waste division is comprised of 600 employees responsible for solid waste collection, management and disposal for

400,000 single-family residents. The Public Works Department owns two transfer stations, two material recovery facilities (aka MRFs or recycling facilities), one compost facility, one open landfill in the City of Buckeye and five closed landfills located within the Phoenix. The Public Works Department has been a leader in the solid waste industry dating back to the 1970's. The concept of managed competition, where government competes with the private sector to deliver city services to residents, was pioneered by the City of Phoenix in the late 1970's. Phoenix was one of the first cities in the nation to adopt the automated collection concept also in the 1970's. In the early 1990's, Phoenix had one of the largest city-owned single stream recycling facilities in the nation. In the past several years, the city has been known for its innovation in transforming waste into a resource and building a circular economy. This success story has generated a national and international reputation for the City of Phoenix and provided guidelines and inspiration for numerous other public agencies.

In his 2011 book *Bird on Fire*, New York University sociologist Andrew Ross branded Phoenix as the least sustainable city in the world. Then Phoenix Mayor and now Congressman Greg Stanton made the sustainability of Phoenix his central goal and challenged city departments to come up with innovative policies and solutions to transform the city into a leader in sustainability.

In 2013, then Mayor Greg Stanton and the Phoenix City Council announced a new citywide sustainability initiative, *Reimagine Phoenix*, to divert 40 percent of waste from the landfill by the year 2020. At the time, Phoenix had a waste diversion of 16 percent. Working with the Public Works Department, the city focused on three main areas to develop goals for this new waste diversion and sustainability initiative: 1) enhancing the city's current solid waste programs to encourage more sustainable practices; 2) increasing community outreach, communication and education about sustainability efforts to residents and to businesses; and 3) partnering with industry and community leaders on sustainability. In the same year, China announced its "Operation Green Fence" policy.

In 2014, fueled by the *Reimagine Phoenix* citywide diversion and sustainability goals, the Phoenix City Council approved funding to initiate the Resource Innovation and Solutions Network (RISN) partnership with Arizona State University (ASU) to establish a network focused on creating value and economic development opportunities from solid waste streams. The five-year partnership was managed and operated by the Walton Sustainability Solutions Initiatives at ASU and extended an additional 18 months through grant funding provided by the U.S. Economic Development Administration. RISN provided research, development, education and solutions to more effectively manage solid waste resources and create economic value. The City and ASU also partnered on the creation of the RISN Technology Solutions Incubator for start-up/emerging technologies and manufacturing processes.

In 2015, the Phoenix City Council approved the development of the Resource Innovation Campus (RIC), a hub for innovators and home for public-private partnerships to be located next to the city-owned transfer-station and recycling facility dedicated to the creation and growth of a circular economy. The RIC offers approximately 50 acres of land available for

leasing and aims to be a hub for innovators and manufacturers with market-ready technologies and manufacturing processes to develop Phoenix's circular economy and find sustainability resources. It seeks to attract innovators and manufacturing companies that will use technologies to transform waste into new products and resources.

The City issued the Reimagine Phoenix Call for Innovators (CFI) in 2015 to seek additional partners to achieve the city's goal of diverting 40 percent of waste from the city's landfill. More commonly known in government procurement as a Request for Information (RFI), the city sought information from innovators with technology and manufacturing processes to transform trash into energy and new products by asking "What are your innovative ideas? What emerging technologies do you want to grow in Phoenix? What market-ready concepts do you have to transform trash into energy and new products? What new technologies and manufacturing processes would you like to develop and improve? How can Phoenix assist in making your ideas come to fruition?" Ideas from the CFI were then turned into Requests for Proposals (RFPs) such as recycled plastics diversion, carpeting and carpet foam, palm frond diversion, anaerobic digestion, waste to energy and other RFPs.

The City of Phoenix became the first American city to become a member of the Ellen MacArthur Foundation's Circular Economy 100 program as a government and cities member in 2016 joining a select group of international municipalities seeking to advance their circular economy thinking and practices, and to collaborate with the business and academic community on innovative circular solutions. Together as members, the city of Phoenix and Arizona State University became the first city-university partner members of the CE100 in the same region working with the Foundation to research and develop innovation and solutions that encourage a more circular economy.

In 2017, the Phoenix City Council unveiled Phoenix's new compost facility located on 27-acres on the Resource Innovation Campus. Using an already-developed site and innovative waste reduction methods, the facility takes green waste from residents and private landscapers and some food waste from local grocers and partners using aerated piles and bio-filters to reduce odors and emissions. Storm water is managed on- and off-site using locally produced compost to prevent run-off. The compost reduces the need for pesticides and fertilizer while diverting waste from the landfill. Compost from the award-winning Envision Silver Sustainability Rating is used on city parks and provided to residents at give-away events.

In 2018, China announced its "National Sword" policy restricting recycling contamination to less than one percent which meant that 80 percent of Phoenix's recyclables did not meet the new criteria. It challenged Phoenix and other cities to evaluate our heavy reliance on international recycling markets and to focus on the need for reinvestment in local markets spurring innovation and job creation.

In 2019, with a zero-interest loan from the Closed Loop Infrastructure Fund, the City of Phoenix updated our aging North Gateway recycling facility to enable greater diversion of plastics from the landfill and to improve the quality of baled paper produced. The upgrade

enabled the city to increase capacity at the north recycling facility and to take the south recycling facility offline, increased capture rates of PET, HDPE, plastics and fiber, and increased recycling revenue.

None of this would be possible without partnerships. The city recognizes that partnerships are critical to achieving our diversion and sustainability goals, because municipal efforts are not enough. The city has partnered with and is member of several organizations committed to improving recycling and building a circular economy such as the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), U.S. Conference of Mayors Municipal Waste Management Association, American Public Works Association, Solid Waste Association of North America, National Waste and Recycling Association, The Recycling Partnership, Closed Loop Partners, the Ellen MacArthur Foundation, U.S. Plastics Pact, Keep America Beautiful, Keep Phoenix Beautiful, and Local First to name a few.

One of the city's greatest partnerships is with its residents. Residents' satisfaction with our solid waste services was evident when they helped approve a rate increase to maintain solid waste services including recycling and composting – the first solid waste rate increase in 11 years that was approved by Mayor Kate Gallego and the Phoenix City Council in February 2020. The following month, the COVID-19 pandemic hit resulting in a 20 percent increase on average in garbage and recycling collection. Due to the leadership and action of the Mayor and City Council, some federal funding, staff perseverance and dedication to help the community, the City of Phoenix is meeting this new challenge.

Looking forward to the future, we embrace the EPA's new goal to increase the national recycling rate to 50 percent by 2030 as we strive to reach our own new Zero Waste By 2050 goal. As an activator of the U.S. Plastics Pact, which is a partnership between The Recycling Partnership, World Wildlife Fund and the Ellen MacArthur Foundation, we are one of 89 activators representing for-profit companies, government entities, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), researchers and other stakeholders along the supply and plastics manufacturing chain working to build a roadmap to address the plastics waste challenge.

In conclusion, the United States has nearly 19,500 cities and towns. National research has shown that residents in these cities and towns value recycling, they want recycling, and they rely on local governments to provide this service. Phoenix has been in the recycling business for more than 30 years. The city went from being the least sustainable city in the world to become a leader in circularity and achieved a high diversion rate of 36% in 2019 exceeding the EPA's national goal of 34 percent without any mandates, fees or fines to incentivize residents to recycle and many times without any increased revenues or resources. These best practices and efforts can be replicated in cities across the nation. Phoenix's experience has proven that investing in sustainability is a good return on investment. To achieve these ambitious diversion goals locally and nationally, it takes investment, partnerships, time and effort.

We urge Committee members to support funding important bills, policies and programs that will help improve recycling in our nation. Thank you for this opportunity to share our story.