

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: Wednesday, November 8, 2017

In Capitol Hill Hearing, Keith Ellison (D, Minnesota) joined by small businesses; workers; advocates to make the urgent case for jobs growth and clean energy via H.R. 1034's zero waste program.

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On Wednesday afternoon, November 8, Congressman **Keith Ellison (D, MN)** led a hearing on **Capitol Hill** in support of his proposed bill H.R. 1034, the [Zero Waste Development & Expansion Act of 2017](#).

Rep. Ellison argued that his bill would spur investment in zero waste infrastructure, "**With zero waste, there's no compromise. We're going to give you a job, and we're going to give you breathable air. You don't have to choose.**" Testimony at the hearing included a gripping, up-to-minute account by Puerto Rican resident Adriana Gonzalez of **the community effort in Arecibo, Puerto Rico to fend off incineration proposals from the private company Energy Answers**. Ms. Gonzalez was joined by Goldman Environmental Prize-winner Destiny Watford, a Baltimore-based community leader, who, at the age of 20, also successfully led an effort to stop an incinerator proposal in Curtis Bay by Energy Answers.

On the jobs front, Brenda Platt from the Institute for Local Self-Reliance noted that "sorting and processing recyclables alone **sustain 10 times more jobs** than sending waste to landfills or incinerators." Recycling has already had a major impact on job creation in local and state economies. Currently, with a national recycling rate of less than 35%, U.S. recycling industries already provide over 800,000 jobs. Research shows that [increasing the U.S. recycling rate to 75% could create 1.5 million jobs](#).

The bill has a strong but underreported connection to recovery efforts in Puerto Rico. In the aftermath of Hurricane Maria, activists from the 'Just Recovery' effort in Puerto Rico are speaking out against incinerators and instead calling for zero waste programs, recycling and well-paying jobs. The near-unimaginable destruction left in the wake of Hurricane Maria has brought forth demand for a 'Just Recovery': a recovery that is equitable and comprehensive, lifting up those who were hit the hardest and prioritizing people and communities rather than corporate polluters. "**We're not just looking at rebuilding but also at transforming what we had**, because it's the only way that we're going to be able to move forward," said presenter Adriana Gonzalez of the Sierra Club Puerto Rico. The recovery effort brings **new urgency to Puerto Ricans' fierce opposition to private incinerator companies, such as Albany-based**

Energy Answers, which seeks to build an [incinerator in Arecibo](#). The [proposed incinerator](#), the proposed site of which saw 5 feet of flooding in Hurricane Maria, would burn [2,100 tons of waste per day](#), and result in drastically increased emissions of CO2, acid gases, and nanoparticles of heavy metals like lead, cadmium, mercury, arsenic and chromium. Puerto Rican residents are eager to avoid another Whitefish situation. In Puerto Rico, residents generate five pounds of trash, per person, per day. But incineration is an [expensive](#), polluting, non-solution that benefits large corporations at the expense of communities' health.

“We have to move beyond these false solutions,” Ms. Gonzalez said. “Anything that is burned on our island is going to create toxic ash on our island.” Added Cynthia Mellon of Climate Justice Alliance, **“A truly ‘Just Recovery’ for Puerto Rico supports healthy communities and living-wage jobs—zero waste programs accomplish both.”**

Ms. Watford, [speaking from her experience](#) of the parallel struggles against Energy Answers incinerator proposals in Baltimore and in Arecibo, Puerto Rico, said, “We have to move beyond this ‘dumping ground’ mentality.” United Workers’ Greg Sawtell added, “In Maryland, burning trash is considered Tier 1 renewable energy, the same as recycling. Which is greenwashing. Our current incinerator, [BRESKO](#) gets renewable energy credits, while creating pollution and toxic ash.”

Ms. Watford continued, **“Incineration is the past. It’s the dinosaur economy. It’s pollution, it’s greenhouse gas emissions. Zero waste is the better future we all want for ourselves and the next generation:** good jobs, healthy neighborhoods, clean air, strong economies. It works for cities, it works for businesses, it even works for domestic manufacturing. It’s a win-win-win. We need this in Puerto Rico, we need it in Baltimore, we need it in Minnesota, we need it everywhere.”

The Congressional Hearing Wednesday highlighted Ellison’s bill, **H.R. 1034**, the [Zero Waste Development & Expansion Act](#) as the path forward for American cities. The hearing featured presenters including: David Levine of the [American Sustainable Business Council](#) (NYC); [Destiny Watford](#), [Goldman Environmental Prize](#) recipient and Greg Sawtell, both of United Workers (Baltimore); [Adriana Gonzalez](#), Sierra Club (Puerto Rico); Janiece Watts, [Eureka Recycling](#) (St. Paul/Minneapolis); Brenda Platt, of the [Institute for Local Self-Reliance](#), (Washington D.C.) and moderator [Ahmina Maxey](#), [GAIA](#), (Detroit). This unlikely grouping of **business, workers, and environmental and climate justice activists** who came together in their support for jobs and clean air—which Ellison’s bill aim to achieve with **zero waste programs that scale-up recycling, reuse, and compost systems, benefitting households, commercial districts and manufacturing.**

Ellison's bill may win the support of voters in his home state: in Minnesota alone, a study found that [reuse programs in the state accounted for 18,000 jobs](#). Eureka Recycling, based in St. Paul, Minnesota, employs over 100 people. "We do our work with the priorities of safety and worker health, highest environmental and human health benefits, family-sustaining wages, schedules, and full time employment for all staff. **Since this facility opened in 2004 we have paid over \$50 million in salaries and benefits for good, green, local jobs,**" reported Eureka's Janiece Watts, who provided testimony at the Congressional Hearing. Eureka, Minnesota's only zero waste enterprise, generates 97% of its profits from fee-for-service; those profits get reinvested in the community.

"For every 1 bag of trash you throw away in your home, 71 bags of waste are created along the production, manufacturing and shipping system. We want to make sure products are designed to be repairable, reusable, recyclable, or compostable," added Ms. Watts.

Brenda Platt from the Institute for Local Self-Reliance added that "making new products from the old offers even more jobs. You may be able to get \$6 a ton for bales of recycled newspaper; compare that to the \$600 a ton you could make in profit from products made from recycled paper. She drew out examples of a number of local, and increasingly, national businesses, "St. Vincent de Paul has created 700 jobs on the West Coast, in retail and resale. And that includes mattresses, appliances, e-scrap, textiles, books. Their experience underscores the opportunities in this bill. With grants and state programs, they've expanded to 10 new locations on the East Coast: 100 new jobs and \$10 million in economic growth. Reuse and repair create even more jobs - these are knowledge-based industries." Ms. Platt also cited the examples of [The Reuse People](#), [Second Chance Baltimore](#), and [Homeboy Industries](#) in LA, all of which create jobs for underemployed populations while driving economic activity within those local economies. **It's time to invest in a new made-in-America recycling-based manufacturing industry.**"

"There are 60,000 businesses in this (recycling and reuse) sector today," said David Levine of the American Sustainable Business Council. Zero waste programs already contribute \$300 billion to our economy. Look at [New Belgium Brewing Company](#). They've had a 99% percent reduction in their waste stream. The minimum wage in this industry is \$17 an hour. You don't have to make a false choice between what's right for communities, what's right and just for people, and what's good for business and the economy."

H.R. 1034 puts forth an efficient business solution: it directs the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) to work with local governments to develop programs for solid waste prevention, reuse, composting, recycling, as well as public education tactics and operations. It is championed by GAIA, the Climate Justice Alliance, United Workers, the Institute for Local Self-Reliance, Sierra Club, Zero Waste USA, Eureka Recycling, U.S. Composting Council, the National Recycling Coalition, and the American Sustainable Business Council. The groups' members are calling on their legislative representatives to co-sponsor the bill.

Ahmina Maxey, of GAIA, said, "**Zero waste, including recycling and composting, is a shot-in-the-arm to domestic manufacturing: this is the solution that works for our economy, our cities, and our families.**"

INTERVIEW OPPORTUNITIES:

- Sponsor: Congressman [Keith Ellison](#) (D, MN)
- Moderator: [Ahmina Maxey](#), [GAIA](#), Detroit
- Presenter: David Levine, [American Sustainable Business Council](#), NYC
- Presenters: [Destiny Watford](#), [Goldman Environmental Prize](#) recipient and Greg Sawtell, United Workers, Baltimore
- Presenter: [Adriana Gonzalez](#), Sierra Club, Puerto Rico
- Presenter: Janiece Watts, [Eureka Recycling](#), St. Paul/Minneapolis
- Presenter: Brenda Platt, [Institute for Local Self-Reliance](#), Washington D.C.

For more information about this bill or hearing, contact:

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DATE & TIME: The live Congressional Hearing was held Wednesday November 8, 2017, at Cannon House Building, Room 122, 27 Independence Ave SE, Washington DC 20003.

The hearing was also [livestreamed on Facebook](#) (and remains available for viewing):

<https://www.facebook.com/Keith.Ellison/videos/vb.7997462059/10155122207527060/?type=3&theater>

THE BILL: H.R. 1034, the Zero Waste Development and Expansion Act of 2017 ([summary](#) | [full text](#))

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