

Director George S. Hawkins - Testimony Before the Council of the District of Columbia

Anacostia River Cleanup and Protection Act of 2009 (April 1, 2009)

Good afternoon, Chairperson Cheh, Chairperson Evans, and members of the Committees. I am George Hawkins, Director of the District Department of the Environment (DDOE). Thank you for the opportunity to present testimony on trash reduction and control in the District, and in particular, B18-150, the "Anacostia River Cleanup and Protection Act of 2009."

Trash Pollution in District Waterways

DDOE is responsible for the District's efforts to control pollution in local streams and rivers. Trash is a major component of the pollution currently fouling the District's waters. While the aesthetic impacts of trash are clear to all who visit the area's waterways, trash can also cause environmental harm to fish, plants, and wildlife that become entangled in, or mistake trash for food. The amount of litter and trash present in the Anacostia River is substantial enough to have resulted in the river being designated "impaired" by trash under the Clean Water Act (the "Act"). Under the Act, the U.S. EPA requires that with such a designation, the District must develop and implement a Total Maximum Daily Load (TMDL) for trash to restore the river.

A "trash TMDL" must result in the District implementing a specific and enforceable pollution reduction plan, which in this case will reduce and control sources of trash throughout the Anacostia watershed. Furthermore, Mayor Fenty, as well as a number of Councilmembers, have signed the "Trash Free Potomac Watershed Treaty," which calls for achieving a "trash free Potomac" by 2013. The District therefore, faces specific requirements and commitments to control trash pollution.

Effects of Bill 18-150 on Trash Pollution

The proposed Anacostia River Cleanup and Protection Act of 2009 focuses on disposable shopping bags, which data indicate are a major component of the trash in the District's waters. DDOE's monitoring has determined that plastic bags account for nearly half of the trash found in streams in the Anacostia watershed, and over 20 percent of the trash in the mainstem of the Anacostia. In some streams in the watershed, such as Watts Branch, surveyors observed a plastic bag every 1.2 feet as they walked the stream banks.

This District is involved in a number of ongoing efforts to reduce pollutants in the area's waterways. This includes for example, the DC Water and Sewer Authority's "floatables removal" program that annually removes hundreds of tons of litter and debris from our rivers, and costs approximately \$300,000 annually. Similarly, the District is investing substantial sums to restore wetlands and stream corridors in the Anacostia watershed, only to find a significant influx of trash that requires costly cleanup and replanting.

Encouraging Reusable Bags and Other Environmental Programs

DDOE has a program to provide reusable shopping bags to low-income and senior residents in the District. We look forward to exploring the expansion of this program using alternative means aside from fees.

I thank you again for the opportunity to testify, and look forward to answering any questions the Committee may have.