



of the Anacostia River

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Montgomery County Council, October 14, 2014 Hearing Testimony IN SUPPORT of Bill 41-14

I am providing this testimony on behalf of the Neighbors of the Northwest Branch. We are a 501(c)(3) nonprofit volunteer watershed organization committed to restoring the health of the 19-mile long stream so this urban treasure can be safely enjoyed by wildlife, our families, and generations to come.

In pursuit of our mission, we maintain a program of action, education, and advocacy. Our members strive to protect the watershed by removing invasive plants and planting native species, supporting reforestation projects and the construction of rain gardens, regularly monitoring sites for changes in water quality, and organizing trash cleanups along the tributary every spring and fall.

As residents of the Anacostia's major tributary, we take very seriously our responsibility to lessen the burden on colleagues downstream who are striving to restore the river's tidal main stem. As you may be aware, both the Anacostia Riverkeeper and the Anacostia Watershed Society have identified polystyrene foam as one of the most common types of trash in the tidal river, the latter reporting that it comprises as much as 20% by volume of the trash they encounter.

During the biannual cleanups of the Neighbors of the Northwest Branch, we routinely remove tires, bottles, paper, and other trash from the stream and the surrounding woods, but polystyrene foam is different. It is much more difficult to retrieve, whether with nets, or with garbage grabbers or by hand, and is thus far more likely to evade us and flow further downstream.

Given the buoyancy of polystyrene foam, what escapes our efforts will likely continue down the river and end up bobbing in the Bay, littering the beach at Ocean City, or endlessly swirling within the ever-growing trash island in

the middle of the Atlantic. Whatever its destination, it will pose a health threat to wildlife as they ingest lethal particles mistaking them for food on the water's surface.

And those particles that elude us will be out there a very long time. Indeed, had Captain John Smith gotten "take out" when he was exploring the Anacostia and tossed a Styrofoam food container overboard, bits of his trash might still with us today. Some have estimated that polystyrene foam floating in the relative cool and darkness of the ocean can last as long as 400 years. The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration's Marine Debris Program, perhaps a bit more cautiously, simply states that it will degrade, but will never "go away".

Not all environmental problems have simple, clear-cut solutions, but luckily some do. The Neighbors of the Northwest Branch have seen with our own eyes the positive impact that the County's fee on plastic bags has had on reducing such trash in our beautiful stream and we fully expect that passage of this bill will have an equally beneficial effect.

So we ask that the County Council pass Bill 41-14 and we invite you to join us at our next cleanup on October 25, at Burnt Mills Park.

James Graham, President
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