

TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF MONTGOMERY COUNTY ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION RECOMMENDATION TO ELIMINATE INCINERATION

April 8, 2026

I am Carrie Witkop and I support the Montgomery County Department of Environmental Protection and the work they have done on solid waste solutions. DEP did a fantastic community presentation March 5, 2026 which outlined their plan and their opposition to incineration. The Department has analyzed the issues and recommended that instead of investing millions of dollars into a failing aging incinerator or its operation a more environmental solution would be to transport our trash to an approved environmental landfill. I agree.

I have also been working on solid waste issues as a Sierra Club Executive Committee member. The Sierra Club has a long standing position against incineration. The Sierra Club opposes any form of combustion of wastes because 1. The energy produced is less than what could be saved if reuse or recycling is done. 2. Unavoidable emissions and ash are toxic. 3. Raw materials are lost. They could be used or recycled. 4. The incinerator has a daily capacity which discourages recycling and composting.

Even with modern scrubbers, heavy metals and toxins still make it into the air, earth, and the water. Toxic gases and particulates including greenhouse gases are emitted. All this causes human health problems especially for the old and young in our community, not to mention serious environmental degradation.

One of the concerns I have had for many years is that we have been sending 150,000 tons of ash from our incinerator to a low income community in Virginia for 30 years. This is just not right. This is truly environmental injustice. It is our trash and it is poisoning others. This does not happen in a regulated landfill. If we send out all of our trash it would amount to 600,000 tons a year. This is a lot. But even so, landfills seem to be a better solution. It is my understanding that the landfills that DEP is

considering are in remote areas in Pennsylvania. They have good methane gas capture and modern liners. My son is a civil engineer and says these land fill systems seem to work well.

If the county is successful in implementing our waste reductions plans the 600,000 tons of waste will be reduced significantly. Within the first year we will hopefully get 20% reduction in construction waste. Within 2 years our food composting program will reduce waste by another 20%. These are ambitious goals. There are a lot of creative ways to accomplish reduction of waste. Including economic incentives for renovations rather than demolitions. Education and even just closer monitoring of what is being dumped at the transfer station would help achieve these goals. The county has demonstrated its commitment. Over time the 600,000 tons will be reduced year after year.

Conclusion

Our nation has a serious waste problem. Our county is no different. Our Department of Environmental Protection is committed to the reduction of waste and has developed a good plan with a variety of programs with a zero waste objective.

Incineration is not the answer. It is clear that incineration causes health and environmental problems. The Dickerson facility is leaking dioxins and failing. We urge you to vote for the budget DEP has proposed. We further agree that funding should be shifted to zero waste solutions. I urge you to vote for the proposed 2027 budget.

We need to reduce our own trash. We need to reach for sustainable non plastic solutions when we hold public gatherings. Thank you for passing the plastic bag ban. The paint recycling program just started April 1. Industry needs to reduce their footprint and the waste they are creating. It is the inconvenient truth. Thank you for your serious commitment to our health and environment.