

**Committee on Energy and Commerce**

**Opening Statement as Prepared for Delivery  
of  
Ranking Member Frank Pallone, Jr.**

***Hearing on “Beyond the Blue Bin: Forging a Federal Landscape for Recycling Innovation  
and Economic Growth”***

**July 16, 2025**

Today the Subcommittee is examining the important topic of recycling. Preventing ocean dumping off the Jersey shore was what initially inspired me to come to Congress, so I am pleased to be discussing ways we can reduce pollution and improve recycling in the United States.

But today’s hearing comes weeks after President Trump signed Republicans’ Big Ugly Bill into law. This bill doubles down on their unconditional support of polluters, propping up the fossil fuel industry at the expense of clean energy, driving up costs for American families, and worsening the climate crisis. Science tells us that to combat the worst effects of climate change, we need to move away from polluting industries, including reducing our reliance on products derived from fossil fuels.

Recycling is an essential tool in our environmental protection toolbox to reduce pollution in communities, boost local economies, combat the climate crisis, and strengthen domestic supply chains. However, with a national recycling and composting rate of just 32 percent, it is clear we still face major gaps in the recycling system that need to be addressed.

That said, the story is not the same for all recyclable materials. For example, paper and cardboard saw a recycling rate of 68 percent in 2018 – that’s higher than any other material. Unfortunately, the same cannot be said for plastic waste, where a staggering 76 percent was sent to the landfill. We can and must do better.

These issues are all compounded by the fact that municipal solid waste recycling systems are severely underfunded across the country. Local governments face tight budgets, and with President Trump’s outright assault on state funding, budgets will now be even tighter. We need to invest in our recycling system to see the improvements we so desperately need.

Democrats recognized that need in passing the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law and the Inflation Reduction Act. Together, billions of dollars were invested to help fill gaps in the recycling system, and to drive battery collection to grow our domestic circular economy for critical minerals.

For example, the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law included \$275 million for the Solid Waste Infrastructure for Recycling grant program, or SWIFR, to bolster recycling infrastructure, helping fund improvements in communities across the country.

Beyond funding, we are seeing promising developments in recycling policy at the state level. Maine, Oregon, Colorado, and others are leading the way by establishing Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR) programs for packaging, to help incentivize manufacturers to use recycled content over virgin materials. New Jersey has minimum recycled content standards for the sale and distribution of certain products. I hope this Subcommittee will explore policies like a national EPR framework to improve our recycling system and help provide certainty for manufacturers.

There are two bipartisan recycling bills: H.R. 4109, the “Recycling and Composting Accountability Act” and H.R. 2145, the “Recycling Infrastructure and Accessibility Act,” that aim to strengthen recycling and composting systems, improve accessibility in underserved communities, and improve data measurement and reporting.

We had a bipartisan and bicameral agreement to pass these bills last year in the end of year funding package, but House Speaker Johnson tanked that entire packet because Elon Musk voiced his opposition to it. I believe these bills are still worth moving, and the Senate Environment and Public Works Committee has already advanced them out of Committee earlier this year. I believe this Committee should do the same.

Finally, while recycling is an important way to address plastic pollution, we must also focus on reducing our use of plastics overall. It is estimated that 8 million metric tons of plastic waste enters the world’s oceans every year. That is the equivalent of dumping a garbage truck full of plastic waste into the ocean every minute.

This plastic waste can break down into smaller pieces, known as microplastics. This is a big deal for my constituents at home on the Jersey shore, as microplastics are polluting the Atlantic and impacting marine life. It is vital that any potential recycling solutions for addressing plastics are science-based, economically feasible, safe for communities, and ultimately make recycled products.

In 2015, I led and President Obama signed into law the bipartisan Micro-bead Free Waters Act, which prohibited manufacturers of rinse-off cosmetics from intentionally adding plastic microbeads. That law remains the only bill Congress has passed to limit microplastics in our environment. That was a decade ago and we must do more.

Like the climate crisis, plastic pollution is a global problem that warrants ambitious cooperation from the international community. The U.S. delegation must continue to be a strong voice at the Global Plastics Treaty negotiations next month. We should not take a backseat or accept weaker standards.

I look forward to hearing from our witnesses today, and I yield back.