



**CONSERVATION
MINNESOTA**

RE: SF 1531 (Ruud)

March 22, 2022

To: Chair Ingebrigtsen and Members of the Environment and Natural Resources Finance Committee,

On behalf of the members of Conservation Minnesota located in all of Minnesota's 87 counties, we write to express our strong support for SF 1531 and we thank Chair Ruud for her support of the bill. As an organization, our mission is to protect the people and the places that Minnesotans love; and capturing the environmental and economic benefits of recycling and waste reduction is central to this goal.

In 1989, the Legislature adopted a set of recycling and waste reduction laws, known as SCORE, in order to effectively manage municipal solid waste according to the state's hierarchy, emphasizing waste reduction, reuse and recycling. SCORE grants immediately became a pivotal part of recycling budgets, helping local communities meet the state's waste hierarchy and, later, the state's recycling goals. However, over time, the state has failed to adjust SCORE grants along with inflation, neglecting counties in order to redirect large portions of the solid waste tax to the General Fund. Today, only 20% of solid waste taxes go to support county SCORE grants, even as 30% or \$27.2 million is diverted to the General Fund.

According to the MPCA, Minnesotans are still throwing away more than 850,000 tons of recyclables, with an estimated value of \$153 million. And, as a result of falling recycling rates and waste-to-energy closure, statewide landfilling of municipal solid waste increased by over 250,000 tons between 2018 and 2019. In order to turn the tide, our communities need to invest in infrastructure and program changes. But at the moment, counties are being left with significant funding gaps due to solid waste tax diversion at the state level.

SF 1531 (Ruud) is a bipartisan bill that seeks to make a long-overdue adjustment to solid waste management tax allocation, and to provide counties with additional resources for waste reduction and recycling. This legislation gradually phases out diversions of the solid waste tax to the General Fund, and directs the increased funding toward SCORE grants. Given the state's current budget surplus, now is the time to recapture funds diverted to the General Fund and make necessary increases to local recycling programs without raising taxes on Minnesotans.

Investing in SCORE is an effective way to create expansive, multiplying economic benefits for communities in all parts of Minnesota. Recycling supports more than 60,000 jobs in our state, paying almost \$3.4 billion in wages and adding nearly \$15.7 billion to Minnesota's economy. Recycling and waste reduction represent major economic opportunities nationwide, and developing local recycling markets keeps those opportunities in Minnesota.

Increasing recycling and limiting waste are vital aspects of protecting our environment and the people who rely on it. Waste reduction and recycling decreases the amount of waste sent to landfills and incinerators, limiting greenhouse gas emissions. Landfills can be a major source of methane emissions. According to the MPCA, food that could otherwise be recycled through organics programs makes up 18% of landfills in Minnesota, where it breaks down and produces methane gas with heat-trapping potential 25 times greater than carbon dioxide.



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Today, this committee has an opportunity to help deliver the benefits of recycling and waste reduction by providing meaningful assistance to local communities. Local governments need help in developing and implementing efficient recycling and waste diversion programs, and that starts with recapturing the portion of the solid waste tax that has been diverted to the General Fund. On behalf of our members, we thank the bipartisan group of legislators responsible for bringing forward SF 1531, and we urge the committee to support this bill.

Sincerely,

Nels Paulsen, Policy Director
David Pelikan, Policy Associate

nels@conservationminnesota.org
david@conservationminnesota.org