



**Written Testimony of Buffalo Niagara Waterkeeper  
To the Senate and Assembly Committees on Environmental Conservation  
Hearing on: Packaging Reduction  
Tuesday, October 24, 2023**

Dear Committee Chair Harckham and Committee Chair Glick,  
Buffalo Niagara Waterkeeper is a community-based organization whose mission is to protect and restore our water and surrounding ecosystems for the benefit of current and future generations. We protect clean water, restore the health of ecosystems, connect people to water, and inspire economic growth and community engagement. For over 20 years, BNW has been regarded as a regional and Great Lakes basin-wide leader in tackling marine debris issues, from facilitating clean-ups to inspiring and piloting collaborative approaches to gathering important marine debris data. Our annual shoreline clean-up events have expanded into community-wide clean-ups, benefiting not just immediate shoreline areas but also neighborhoods and communities that are burdened with litter and become source areas for marine debris. We are also the coordinators of the Basin wide Great Lakes CleanUp, a multi-state effort which engages over 15 partner organizations and over 7,500 volunteers.

As the coordinators of these cleanup efforts, we see the unfortunate impact of litter on our communities and waterway ecosystems. At our most recent Spring Sweep, held on Earth Day, 1,329 volunteers collected an estimated 18,920 pounds of trash in and around the Buffalo Niagara Region. **80% of this litter is plastic.** Volunteers collected 4,234 plastic food wrappers and 2,658 plastic bottles in this 2-hour cleanup effort. Our data shows a consistent amount of litter collected each year at cleanup events.

We are supportive of Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR) and hope that the New York State Legislature adopts a strong bill. Our communities and waterways deserve the opportunity to flourish and not be the dumping ground for unrecyclable single-use materials. The responsibility of this packaging, which by design is difficult to recycle, needs to be shifted to the producer. Non-profit groups and municipal taxpayers have been cleaning up these industries' wasteful byproducts for decades while struggling to fund curb-side recycling programs. By incorporating reduction standards into an EPR bill, producers will be forced to rethink their current packaging, shifting toward truly recyclable materials or re-use systems. "Innovations" like molecular recycling and chemical recycling should not be entertained as permissible options. Plastic materials contain many chemicals, and the plastic resins degrade quickly over time resulting in challenges in recycling the materials in the long term. Our local municipalities' curbside recycling programs would also benefit tremendously from a strong EPR bill.

Additionally, solid waste operators across NYS are facing increased difficulties in handling the toxic leachate resulting from increased manufacturing waste streams, resulting in the shipment



of solid waste and its byproduct from outside of Western New York into our Great Lakes communities. This is in stark contrast with the efforts of BNW and others to protect the source of drinking water for over 11 million people in the US and Canada. Producers need to be the drivers of a solutions-oriented, accountable approach to reducing and eliminating harmful waste streams from WNY communities, rather than continuing to displace the burden of waste management to the residents and local communities.

Sincerely,

Kerrie Gallo  
Deputy Executive Director  
Buffalo Niagara Waterkeeper