



January 24th, 2024

Testimony on 2023 Senate Bill 876

Relating to: funding for education on solid waste reduction, recovery, and recycling and making an appropriation.

Dear Chairman Cowles, Vice-Chair Wimberger, and Committee Members:

Thank you for the opportunity to testify in support of Senate Bill 876 this morning.

Recycling is confusing, and our current system, as well intentioned as it is, has made it more difficult for Wisconsinites to participate in recycling programs statewide. For example, according to a 2023 report from the Recycling Partnership, a Washington, D.C.-based nonprofit that works to advance recycling-based initiatives, 78% of Americans look to their product labels to help them with recycling, and strikingly, 70% of Americans admit to being confused by said product labels. This results in nearly half of all household recyclable materials ending up in the trash.

Awareness and education seem to be the key to addressing this disparity. According to the same report, 8 in 10 Americans reported that recycling has a "positive impact" and is a "valuable public service". The report recommends better communication between recycling providers and customers to help people feel more confident in their recycling decisions and ability to participate in a larger recycling system.

Wisconsin is already ahead of the curve when it comes to this recommendation. According to state statute, the Department of Natural Resources (DNR) is required to provide assistance to Wisconsinites "in all aspects of recycling". However, they are unable to dip into the environmental fund to help cover the costs of the requirement.

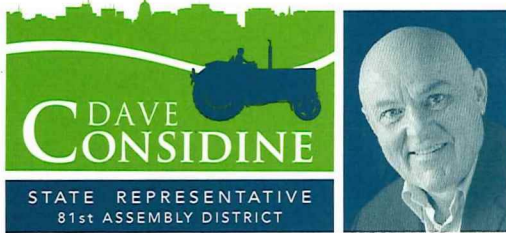
Senate Bill 876 would allow the DNR to access the environmental fund to help support its efforts in educating the public on recycling here in Wisconsin. The data shows that increased education and awareness helps improve recycling outcomes – providing more resources to our state outreach makes this simple fix a no brainer in my opinion.

Thank you again for allowing me to testify in support of this important legislation. I am happy to take any questions.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Jesse James".

Senator Jesse James
23rd Senate District



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Senate Bill 876
Public Testimony
Senate Committee on Natural Resources and Energy
January 24, 2024

Thank you Chairman Cowles for the opportunity to testify today on Senate Bill 876. I would also like to thank Representatives Novak and Conley and Senator James for joining me in authoring this bill.

Throughout my time in office, I have been looking into ways to improve recycling in Wisconsin. I have discussed recycling policy ideas with constituents, recycling professionals, and the Department of Natural Resources (DNR). One key piece that comes up is education about what can be recycled. After meeting with DNR, I learned about a prohibition in statutes that stifles DNR's efforts to educate the public about recycling.

The DNR is required under law to provide assistance to Wisconsinites "in all aspects of recycling" yet they are prohibited from using the environmental fund to pay for education about recycling. These statutes are contradictory. By resolving this contradiction, appropriated recycling funds could enhance and further campaigns to reduce recycling stream contamination and improve recycling industry viability.

This bill is a simple proposal allowing the DNR to use the program's environmental account funds to pay for recycling education activities. I hope that members of the Senate Committee on Natural Resources and Energy will support this common-sense and beneficial piece of legislation.



Senate Committee on Natural Resources and Energy

2023 Senate Bill 876

Funding for education on solid waste reduction, recovery, and recycling

January 24, 2024

Good morning Chair Cowles and members of the Committee. My name is Kate Strom Hiorns, and I am the Recycling and Solid Waste Section Manager for the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources. With me today is Jennifer Semrau, the department's Waste Reduction and Diversion Coordinator, to assist with questions. Thank you for the opportunity to testify, in support of, Senate Bill 876 (SB 876), related to funding for education on solid waste reduction, recovery, and recycling.

The bill would allow two appropriations to be used to fund an existing statewide program to inform and educate local governments, schools, the solid waste industry, businesses, and the general public on solid waste and recycling, including the waste management hierarchy of reduction, reuse, recycling composting, energy recovery, land disposal and burning of solid waste. Importantly, it would allow the department to use these appropriations for critical education priorities such as the proper handling and disposal of lithium-ion batteries to prevent fires in Wisconsin's solid waste and recycling infrastructure.

The bill would provide greater flexibility and clarify authority for the department to use the recycling appropriation for its intended purposes. It resolves the conflict between what the statutes assign to us as duties and what the budget line allows us to do because these activities are currently excluded from the appropriations. In addition to supporting local community recycling programs more effectively, eliminating this conflict will help us implement direct, statewide recycling education.

Because of the limitation in statute this bill seeks to resolve, the department's recycling education has up to now focused on regulatory guidance and providing resources for others to use in recycling education. Examples of these resources include publications local governments can provide to residents on recycling, a guide to recycling for owners of apartments and other multi-family dwellings, and webpages on the basic recycling service requirements for communities. The department also produces an e-newsletter called Recycling News, which provides program and industry updates, webinar announcements, and other recycling or waste diversion news.

As funding is available, this bill would allow us the flexibility to use methods such as statewide online advertising, radio and tv ads, development of public service announcements and educational videos, and more. These efforts will promote the policies the legislature has articulated in s. 287.05, Wis. Stats., to maximize solid waste reduction, reuse, recycling, composting and resource recovery.

On behalf of the Department of Natural Resources, we would like to thank you for your time today. We would be happy to answer any questions you may have.