SOLID WASTE ASSOCIATION OF NORTH AMERICA

January 13, 2022

Honorable Isaac Schleifer, Chairman
Rules and Legislative Oversight Committee
Baltimore City Council
100 Holliday Street
Baltimore, MD 21202

Re: Hearing LO22-0020

Dear Chairman Schleifer:

I am writing in connection with the January 13, 2022, hearing that this committee is holding concerning delayed solid waste collection in the City of Baltimore. Specifically, I want to provide the committee with a national perspective on the significant impact that the Omicron variant of COVID-19 is currently having on the collection of solid waste and recycling in the United States.

The Solid Waste Association of North America (SWANA) is the leading association for solid waste professionals in the United States. Headquartered in Silver Spring, Maryland, SWANA has more than 10,000 members and a very active Mid-Atlantic Chapter. Kristyn Oldendorf at the Baltimore City Department of Public Works is the current Chair of the SWANA Mid-Atlantic chapter.

The number of new COVID-19 cases being reported in January exceeds prior levels and is causing elevated illness and absentee levels among sanitation workers. According to data collected by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and Johns Hopkins University, more than 1 million new cases were reported on a daily basis earlier this week, and the United States is currently averaging nearly 800,000 new cases per day over the past week. Governor Hogan declared a state of emergency on January 4 in response to the record level of COVID-19 hospitalizations in the State of Maryland. These numbers on a state-wide and national level are widely expected to increase in the short-term.

Solid waste departments have seen a sharp uptick in absences over the past month, due to the highly contagious Omicron variant. Combined with the seasonal increase in residential waste and recycling that typically occurs during the holidays, this is causing collection delays and the temporary suspension of certain services throughout the United States. Just in the past few weeks, collection delays and/or suspensions of certain collection services (e.g., recycling, yard waste) has been reported in Atlanta, Dallas, Detroit, Houston, New York City, Philadelphia and much of south Florida. According to Waste Dive, a leading solid waste trade publication, “unlike previous case surges, which were more regional, this latest wave has been felt across the country.” A CNN story earlier this week reported on the staffing shortages that Omicron is causing in a number of industries, including sanitation workers.

SWANA is pleased to provide this information to you and other members of the Baltimore City Council. Please do not hesitate to contact me if you or others at the City Council have any questions at dbiderman@swana.org or 240-494-2254.

Sincerely,



David Biderman
Executive Director & CEO

Cc: Baltimore DPW Director Jason Mitchell