



## LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS OF MASSACHUSETTS

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### IN SUPPORT OF H. 833

#### **An Act Relative to Producer Responsibility for Discarded Electronic Products**

Testimony submitted to the Joint Committee on Environment, Natural Resource and Agriculture  
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The League of Women Voters of Massachusetts urges that you support H. 833, “An Act Relative to Producer Responsibility for Discarded Electronic Products.”

The League of Women Voters of the United States began working on the issues of solid waste management and disposal of hazardous waste in the 1970’s. League efforts resulted in the passage of significant federal legislation, such as the Resource Conservation and Recovery Act of 1976 and the Toxic Substance Control Act of 1976. In the 1990’s the League embraced a “reduce, reuse, recycle” hierarchy and has continued to support programs and legislation that promote the reduction and safe disposal of waste. H. 833 is consistent with League policies and principles regarding the need to reduce and dispose of waste safely and responsibly.

Discarded electronics constitute a growing percentage of the municipal solid waste stream in Massachusetts. The Massachusetts Municipal Association estimates that less than 20%<sup>1</sup> of the 183,000 tons of electronic waste (e-waste) generated in the commonwealth is recycled<sup>2</sup>, resulting in a polluted stream of toxic contaminants such as lead, mercury, PVC and cadmium flowing into our soil, waterways, and atmosphere when e-waste is buried in landfills or incinerated<sup>3</sup>.

In addition to the environmental harm caused by e-waste, municipalities bear the financial burden of its collection and disposal. The Department of Environmental Protection estimates that Massachusetts communities spend between \$2 and \$4 million annually on e-waste processing and disposal in addition to unreported costs related to transportation, collection and administration of e-waste programs. These costs would be higher if the class of banned products was expanded beyond cathode ray tubes (CRTs) to include other electronic equipment. Passage of H. 833 would relieve municipalities of this expense.

The associated costs and challenges of recycling e-waste discourage residents from recycling and contribute to the tonnage of discarded equipment making its way into the waste stream. H. 833 will require producers to provide easily accessible collection sites at no cost to the consumer, thereby increasing safe recycling of electronic equipment and decreasing e-waste disposal.

Recycling of e-waste is further complicated by the amount of dangerous elements embedded in them. Materials such as lead and mercury are not easily reclaimed, and are difficult to retrieve due to the physical design of many electronic products. For example, CRT monitors alone can contain from 4 to 8 pounds of lead, a material that is notoriously difficult to recycle<sup>4</sup>. Giving producers responsibility for the full life cycle of electronics, as

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<sup>1</sup> Environmental Protection Agency

<sup>2</sup> Clean Water Action E-Waste Fact Sheet

<sup>3</sup> Massachusetts Municipal Association

proposed by H. 833, encourages the design of electronic products that contain fewer toxic chemicals, fewer materials, and are easier to repair, reuse, and recycle.

H. 833 would further reduce the amount of toxic materials released into the environment from the estimated 80% of e-waste in the Commonwealth that is not presently being recycled. The requirement that producers disclose levels of toxins in their products that exceed levels established under the European Union Reduction of Hazardous Substance directive would provide consumers with the information to make cleaner technology choices when buying electronics.

Passage of H. 833 would effectively address each of the issues outlined above. Shifting responsibility for the collection and safe disposal of discarded electronics from local governments to producers would result in the following positive outcomes:

- Reduction of environmental pollution from improperly disposed e-waste,
- Relief to cities and towns of the responsibility for the cost of collection and disposal of discarded e-waste, freeing funds for support of essential public services,
- Encouragement of responsible product design to control waste of resources and energy,
- Increase in safe recycling of electronics through registered processors.

Eighteen states and New York City have all passed e-waste legislation based on a Producer Responsibility approach. Since 2001, 180 towns and cities in Massachusetts have signed e-waste resolutions calling for the passage of Producer Responsibility legislation. It is time that Massachusetts supported communities struggling to deal with the expense and pollution associated with the annually increasing tonnage of discarded electronics. H. 833 provides a common sense approach to e-waste management.

We ask that you pass this bill out of committee with a positive vote and work to see that it is passed into law.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

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<sup>4</sup> Electronics Take Back Coalition (<http://www.electronicstakeback.com/index.htm>) Found on Clean Water Action site