

July 7, 2015

(by email transmission)

Councilmember Mary M. Cheh
Council of the District of Columbia
1350 Pennsylvania Avenue NW, Suite 108
Washington, DC 20004

Re: Proposed Contract with Covanta Fairfax for Incineration of Municipal Waste

Dear Councilmember Cheh:

On behalf of well over a hundred thousand citizens of the District of Columbia who suffer from chronic lung diseases such as asthma, chronic bronchitis and emphysema, the American Lung Association in the District of Columbia writes to express deep concern that the proposed multi-year contract with Covanta Fairfax for the combustion of municipal waste would pose excessive and avoidable threats to those citizens' health for far too long. We also represent hundreds of thousands more in the District alone—the young, the elderly, those with cardiovascular disease and with diabetes, as well as those living in poverty, who also are put at increased risk when they breathe polluted air.

Not only are nitrogen oxide emissions from such a facility likely to worsen the frequency, duration, and severity of episodes of adverse respiratory health effects, but these emissions are in turn the precursors for both ground-level ozone smog and nitrate-based fine particle pollution, secondary pollutants that pose health hazards in their own right. In fact, as shown in the American Lung Association's most recent annual *State of the Air* report (April, 2015), the District of Columbia already shows a significantly failing grade for ozone smog pollution, with 22 days of unhealthy air quality, under the current weak standard, recorded over the 2011-2013 reporting period.

The American Lung Association further recognizes that municipal waste incineration produces numerous toxic air pollutants ranging from metals to acid gases to dioxins and furans, each of which represents health risks, exposing children and adults to potential harm.

For all of these reasons the American Lung Association supports programs and policies that first reduce, reuse, and recycle as much of the waste stream as possible, and then compost or use safe non-combustion alternatives to dispose of all remaining waste.

Therefore, the American Lung Association in the District of Columbia urges you and your colleagues to refrain from bringing the proposed multi-year contract with Covanta Fairfax to a vote—and to defeat such a motion if it is.

Rather, given the leadership you and Council have already shown in working toward zero-waste goals by advancing the Sustainable DC and Sustainable Solid Waste Management laws, along with the ongoing search for a new director for the Department of Public Works (DPW), and the need for conclusions from the Interagency Waste Reduction Working Group (IWRWG), it seems reasonable to pursue development of an interim step—extending the current contract on a short-term basis, just long enough to allow the new DPW director, with guidance from the Department of the Environment and armed with recommendations of the IWRWG, to prepare a new request for waste management proposals more in keeping with the best long-term goals of the District of Columbia, and one that proactively supports the health of its citizens.

Sincerely,



Kevin M. Stewart
Director of Environmental Health

cc: Chairman Phil Mendelson

Councilmembers Vincent Orange, Anita Bonds, David Grosso, Elissa Silverman, Brianne Nadeau, Jack Evans, Brandon T. Todd, Kenyan McDuffie, Charles Allen, Yvette Alexander, LaRuby May