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Remarks to the Joint Legislative Audit and Review Commission

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Good morning, Commission members, Mr. Chairman, my name is Erica Trout, and I am the Association Manager for the Virginia Recycling Association. With me are several of our members, including many of our Board of Directors.

The VRA is the only state-wide organization dedicated to promoting recycling. We are the people who make recycling happen in the Commonwealth. I am here to represent our 150 members, all of the local recycling coordinators in every locality in Virginia and all of the businesses who have chosen Virginia to collect recyclable materials. I am also here on behalf of the thousands of citizens who contact us each year with their recycling questions and concerns.

Last week, we had the benefit of reading the exposure draft of the JLARC study on waste minimization and recycling. We greatly appreciate the courtesy extended to us by the JLARC staff members. We provided written comment on the draft, which is included in your packet. Today, we are honored to have this opportunity to provide a more in-depth response on this important study.

One of the primary findings of this report—the first point emphasized in the document—is that Virginia’s laws and statutes prefer waste reduction and recycling over disposal of waste in landfills or incinerators. The General Assembly does not need to be convinced of the benefits. However, as the JLARC report also makes clear, relatively few resources are dedicated to waste reduction, wide-ranging planning and guidance are limited, and long-term waste reduction goals have not been identified.

This study, as you know, was asked to evaluate the waste reduction programs currently being administered by the State. They found that most of the modest resources—which was approximately \$7 million in 2007—are focused on one program: waste tire management. Rather than just pointing out that this leaves a tiny amount of funding for all of the other recycling programs, consider what the tire management program shows. Virginia is committed to cleaning up tire piles across the state, and the tire management program is widely recognized as a quality program. It has a long-term plan, facilitating its success. It has specific, state-wide goals, and for several years has been on a steady path to meeting those goals. It has a dedicated source of revenue, which was recently renewed by the General Assembly. All of these

The VRA is a 501 (c)(3) non-profit and strives to educate and promote effective recycling and waste reduction methods.

elements, combined with dedication from State employees and the business sector, result in a program with measurable benefits to Virginians and their natural environment. As I mentioned, Virginia already has a statutory commitment to waste reduction and recycling. The VRA believes that the same support—state-wide planning and guidance, long-term goals, adequate resources—combined with the efforts of dedicated employees and a business sector primed for growth can bring the same success for all recycling programs.

JLARC staff was also asked to evaluate the success of other states' waste reduction programs, including recycling efforts. One of the most remarkable differences between Virginia and other states is the state-level effort put into development of recycling markets. Although both the Department of Business Assistance and the Governor-appointed Virginia Recycling Markets Development Council are supposed to develop markets, they do not receive any resources to do so. As a result, no formal economic development for the marketing of recyclable materials exists at the state level. Compare this to the finding in the JLARC report that while localities report trouble finding markets, processors and end users report difficulty obtaining the materials they want. Two states with substantial waste management sectors like ours, Pennsylvania and North Carolina, dedicate significant resources to developing recycling markets. For example, last week Pennsylvania announced \$1 million in grant funds available to manufacturers so they can buy equipment that increases their use of recycled content in finished products. Through such programs, Pennsylvania actively grows this economic sector, to the benefit of its environment and its economy. There are more than 3,200 recycling and reuse businesses and organizations in Pennsylvania. They employ more than 81,000 people at an annual payroll of approximately \$2.9 billion. These businesses also make gross annual sales of over \$18.4 billion and pay \$305 million in taxes.

Finally, JLARC was asked to evaluate successful programs operating within the Commonwealth. Despite the challenges I have just mentioned, there are programs doing great things in Virginia. Many of the localities succeed at meeting and exceeding their recycling rate goals. The recycling industry keeps expanding, reaching more customers who want to recycle even when they're not required to do so. And this year, the VRA conducted three school recycling workshops, attended by more than 400 teachers, administrators, and parents who want to recycle and don't know where to start.

So I ask you:

- What could happen to these efforts if they had greater support at the state level?
- How many more localities would reach their recycling rate goals with planning and technical support from the state?
- What would be the overall economic impact to the state if we encouraged this growing sector of business and developed recycling markets in Virginia?
- How much more would students learn about the environment, energy conservation, waste reduction, personal responsibility, and citizenship if their schools had the resources to implement the recycling programs they have been asking for?

And this is just what we could do with our current programs and a little more resources. With a dedicated source of revenue applied toward the efforts I have described today, we could become even better-known for our waste reduction and recycling industry than we are for our waste disposal industry.

The Virginia Recycling Association thanks you for this time today. We know Virginia values waste reduction and recycling. We know that challenges are also overwhelming opportunities to make a difference for recycling. And we also know that with a protected non-general fund revenue source and supporting the recommendations in the JLARC report, you can make changes that benefit localities, businesses, schools, and residents who want to reduce waste, conserve energy, preserve resources, and protect our environment. Thank you.