**Sample Letter to Editor**

***provided by Keep Pennsylvania Beautiful - October 2021***

On behalf of the residents, businesses and government staff who are working tirelessly (many who volunteer) to reduce the amount of trash in our communities, I’d like to share the high costs of illegal dumping and littering, and also bring attention to the causes of trash issues in [community name]. We need to focus on preventing these behaviors.

The problem in our state is all too visible. Through their research, Keep Pennsylvania Beautiful, the state affiliate of Keep America Beautiful, has documented:

* Dumpsites can be found in all 67 counties in the state - *6,500* at last count, a conservative number.
* There are also approximately *502.5 million* pieces of litter on Pennsylvania roadways.
* It is a growing problem. Just in 2020 the number of reports of illegal dumping, litter, and graffiti jumped 213% over the previous year.

Enforcement is a necessary component of the solution, along with increased public education and expanding convenient and affordable trash disposal. We also need to concentrate on the underlying reasons for illegal dumping and litter. These causes are often complex and can vary per community, however issues like lack of waste and recycling infrastructure, inadequate public education, and blight--both urban and rural--must be better addressed if we are to reduce dumping and littering.

While potentially difficult to address, all taxpayers already pay a high price for illegal dumping and litter.

* Cleanups are costly, averaging $600 per ton, or $3,000 per site. This diverts tax dollars and staff resources that could be better spent on community infrastructure, parks or social programs.
* Pennsylvania cities spend over *$68.5 million* *annually on litter and illegal dumping*; the bulk on clean-ups, almost 69% or *$54.5 million each year*.
* Despite the large amount spent on cleanups, *a mere* $776,700 was spent on education and outreach.
* Removing this trash is necessary for residents’ quality of life. However, these cleanups are reactive and alone do not deter future dumping.

These crimes can depreciate property values and send a message that no one cares about the community, further eroding the quality of life.

A 2020 public opinion study, which mirrored results from a previous poll, found that many residents don’t take enforcement of litter and illegal dumping laws seriously:

* *84%* felt there was little likelihood people would be caught.
* *37.5%* responded they wouldn’t be likely to report littering because they felt the perpetrator would not be penalized.

Historically, a hurdle in penalizing illegal dumpers and litterers has been the difficulty in obtaining concrete evidence. High-tech surveillance equipment is often simply beyond many municipal budgets.

Since 2013 KPB has been tackling these issues through the Illegal Dump Free PA program, funded by the PA Department of Environmental Protection. The program provides easily-installed, yet highly-effective, surveillance cameras free of charge to state municipalities and non-profit agencies. These efforts are paying off. As of September 2021, the program has installed cameras in 54 communities that netted 87 convictions and returned over $25,000 to municipalities and state agencies in fines, restitution, and court fees.

Enforcement along with ensuring affordable, accessible disposal and public education are all essential to reducing littering and illegal dumping. Through strong partnerships among government, non-profits, and industry, KPB believes that we can ultimately change the habits and behavior of others and significantly reduce trash in our communities. Learn more about programs and research at https://www.keeppabeautiful.org

[Name, contact info]