



Governor Maura Healey
State House, 24 Beacon Street
Governor's Office Room 280
Boston, MA 02133

Dear Governor Healey,

I am writing to ask for your leadership and assistance in helping to solve the litter problem here in the beautiful Commonwealth of Massachusetts.

From Cape Cod to Boston to the Berkshires and everywhere in between, litter is visible along virtually every Massachusetts highway, sidewalk, public park, and beach. Plastic, aluminum, and glass beverage containers of all kinds, along with fast food trash, cigarette butts, vaping devices, plastic bags, and other common types of litter are found everywhere. Along our interstate highways, the problem is even more acute, with discarded tires, plastic buckets, construction materials, plastic wrapping, and "flyaway" litter from truckers added to the mix.

Every year, local and state governments in Massachusetts spends millions of dollars cleaning up this mess. Thousands of volunteers from **Keep Massachusetts Beautiful** and other volunteer groups also donate countless hours battling the ever-growing piles of litter. **Yet virtually no money or effort is dedicated statewide to LITTER PREVENTION in Massachusetts.**

The mess in Massachusetts sends the message that Massachusetts residents (and its government leaders) really don't care much about our state's appearance or environmental health. For a state with an economy that relies heavily on tourism dollars, that's the wrong message to be sending.

In addition to being plain ugly to look at, our litter problem comes with financial and environmental costs. According to the most recent estimates from MassDOT (which are rough estimates from 2016), prison inmates, crews from Sponsor-a-Highway, and MassDOT's own employees remove more than 360 tons of trash annually along our major highways annually. As noted, these efforts cost the state and local municipalities millions each year. Nobody knows exactly much, however, because MassDOT does not track this data.

But let's be clear—we are only cleaning up a tiny fraction of what's out there. Most of the litter remains in place or makes its way into our streams, rivers, and oceans.

Rather than simply accepting the appearance of our roadsides and public spaces, Keep Massachusetts Beautiful (a nonprofit) is doing something about it. Keep Massachusetts Beautiful engages volunteers, municipal and state leaders, and the business community to **TAKE ACTION to reduce litter**, while also promoting education and enforcement of existing laws to prevent litter in the first place. KMB is a state-level affiliate of Keep America Beautiful, the nation's largest community improvement organization. Learn more at www.keepmassbeautiful.org.

Together with 40+ local chapters across the state, volunteers from Boston to Salem (**ask Kim Driscoll about Keep Salem Beautiful**) to Cape Cod to Springfield participate in the **Great Massachusetts Cleanup** each year. However, these volunteer efforts alone won't provide a permanent solution to the litter problem in Massachusetts.

To make a meaningful long-term improvement, **our government leaders need to take a proactive, comprehensive approach to solve this problem.**



I am writing to urge you to support the creation of a statewide **Litter Free Massachusetts Task Force**. A key component of this Task Force would be to launch an **Anti-Litter Public Awareness Campaign** that would include:

- A consistent anti-littering slogan and message: Keep Mass Litter Free! (or something similar)
- Messaging could be displayed on electronic message boards along our highways, as well as on MassDOT-managed and donated billboards
- Public Service Announcements could be broadcast on TV and radio, local cable access channels, social media, and be integrated with Registry of Motor Vehicles communications to drivers
- A dedicated page on the Keep Massachusetts Beautiful website would include additional anti-litter resources

Our www.change.org/litterfreemass petition calling for the creation of a Massachusetts Litter Prevention & Cleanup Task Force already has 4,300 supporters.

I also urge you to support stepped up enforcement of existing anti-litter laws. The existing signs along Massachusetts highways that warn of fines of up to \$15,000 are an empty threat without any actual enforcement. Additional financial resources are also necessary to enable MassDOT to keep our major highways litter-free all year long. Most MassDOT districts have small budgets for litter cleanup and simply do the bare minimum to keep highways free of dangerous debris.

Other states across the U.S. have similar PSA campaigns that have raised awareness about litter prevention and taught people of all ages to dispose of their trash properly. This includes:

- Rhode Island: Clean Rhodes (www.dot.ri.gov/projects/CleanRhodes)
- Texas: Don't Mess With Texas (www.dontmesswithtexas.org)
- Tennessee: Nobody Trashes Tennessee (www.nobodytrashestennessee.com)
- Delaware: Keep Delaware Litter Free (www.governor.delaware.gov/litter-free)
- Virginia: Virginia is For Lovers, Not Litter (www.loversnotlitter.org)

In addition to a PSA campaign, I urge you to consider these additional litter prevention solutions:

- **Increased funding for MassDOT to combat highway litter.** MassDOT currently lacks the personnel and funding it needs to keep up with the volume of litter. MassDOT conducts virtually no litter cleanup between the months of November and April, allowing trash and debris to pile up all winter long. Weather permitting, inmates and MassDOT cleanup crews should be working year-round to prevent the deplorable conditions that currently exist. With a dedicated cleanup budget (and more accountability) the state could increase the number of cleanup crews on state highways and keep our roadsides trash-free on a year-round basis.
- **Increased enforcement of existing anti-littering and illegal dumping laws.** It's difficult to collect hard data (the Massachusetts State Police did not respond to requests for this information), but judging by the mess, the number of littering tickets issued in Massachusetts is quite low. People litter with impunity because there are rarely any consequences. If Massachusetts enforced its anti-littering laws, this could change behaviors. Stricter enforcement of trucks with uncovered loads and illegal dumping would also have an enormous impact. A statewide warning letter system, whereby citizens could report instances of litter flying out of car windows or truck beds, would also help deter would-be litterers.
- **A comprehensive approach to waste reduction.** Rather than seeking to reduce the sources of litter in a piecemeal fashion, let's pass a comprehensive statewide bill to reduce solid waste, such as An Act to Save



Recycling Costs in the Commonwealth (HD 1553 & SD 1123). Another effective approach is New Jersey’s anti-litter program, which levies a tax on 15 categories of “litter-generating products.” The revenue funds litter cleanups and municipal recycling programs. Since 2003, this program has reduced visible roadside litter in New Jersey by 53%.

- **Dedicated funding in the state budget to support Keep Massachusetts Beautiful.** In many other states, Keep America Beautiful state-level affiliates receive ongoing state funding. In exchange, these affiliates promote the state’s Adopt-a-Highway and Sponsor-a-Highway programs, coordinate local and statewide litter cleanups, and administer educational programs to change behaviors and teach people not to litter. Every \$1 invested in Keep America Beautiful affiliates yields a significant return on investment, without the cost of hiring permanent state employees.

A cleaner, litter-free landscape is good for business, the economy, the residents of Massachusetts, and our environment. I also believe the solution to our state’s litter problem depends on personal responsibility and actions. **With financial support from the state, Keep Massachusetts Beautiful can be the conduit to increased civic pride, community action, reduced litter, and a cleaner, greener state.**

Please provide the leadership we need and support Keep Massachusetts Beautiful’s efforts to find solutions to our state’s litter problem. I encourage you to contact Neil Rhein, KMB’s Executive Director, at neil@keepmassbeautiful.org for more information.

Sincerely,

P.S., Please see the next page for actual photos of littered Massachusetts roadsides and public spaces.

