Thank you for the opportunity to comment on legislation that will reduce the amount of food waste generated in DC. We are Jennifer Dickman, the chair of the Zero Waste Committee of the Washington, DC Chapter of the Sierra Club, and Ravi Saxena, the leader of the Business Composting Subcommittee of the Zero Waste Committee. Our Chapter represents over 4,000 District residents, dues-paying members and supporters, who care about the natural environment and our urban ecology. The Chapter’s Zero Waste Committee works to move DC toward zero waste — a future where the norm involves reduction, reuse, recycling, and composting as opposed to incineration or landfilling. Today, we will speak about why the Sierra Club supports B22-72, the Save Good Food Amendment Act of 2017, and will provide a few brief suggestions to maximize the legislation’s impact.

This bill makes several improvements to the current food donation system that will both benefit DC residents and reduce food waste. First, this bill creates an incentive to donate food by allowing businesses and individuals who donate to nonprofits to receive tax credits. We appreciate that the definition of “food donation” isn’t limited to food from grocery stores and restaurants, but that it also includes food grown through urban farming or by community gardens in DC. This phrasing allows more food to be donated and does more to reduce food waste.

Second, we appreciate that the legislation makes food donations more likely by addressing important barriers to donating: concerns about liability and the misperception that all food eaten past the date label is unsafe.

Third, if food producers end up removing date labels on food where the labels are deemed unnecessary and no longer required by the Department of Health, people will waste less food because they can consume it for longer periods of time.

Fourth, the proposed food donation guide, with its extensive and informative content, will truly help facilitate the donation process. Zero Waste Committee members have spoken with businesses in DC about logistical barriers to food donation, and this guide would help address
those obstacles and lead to more donations across the District.

We recommend that the food donation guide include a list of organizations that have donated food in the past along with their addresses and contact information. This way, food donation recipients can proactively find nearby donors instead of waiting for donors to find them. It would also be helpful to have an online map of both donors and recipients. Several phone apps and websites have been developed to connect food donors and recipients by allowing them to post what they want to donate or need.

All of the bill’s enhancements to the current system would mean that less food is wasted. Since DC does not currently mandate composting throughout the city, all food waste that is not voluntarily composted ends up in an incinerator or a landfill and creates pollution. Less food waste means less pollution. The Zero Waste Committee supports citywide composting, and in its absence, we are embarking on a campaign to convince restaurants and office buildings to contract with compost haulers. However, in line with the sustainable solid waste management hierarchy that was enacted by this Council in 2014,¹ we believe it is best to prioritize source reduction over composting, since waste that is not generated in the first place is truly “zero” waste.

We wholeheartedly support this legislation. Thank you to the members of these committees who introduced this bill: Councilmembers Cheh, Evans, Grosso, and Nadeau. We look forward to the Council’s swift passage of this legislation.

Thank you very much for your time.

Reply to:
Sierra Club
Attn: Jennifer Dickman
50 F Street NW, 8th FL
Washington, DC 20001
607-222-1862
jendickman@gmail.com

¹ https://beta.code.dccouncil.us/dc/council/code/sections/8-1031.02.html