Meaghan Fitzgerald

My name is Meaghan Fitzgerald. I live in Seattle with my husband and two kids, and I read the full draft preliminary needs assessment because I am exactly the resident this system depends on: I want to recycle, I sort carefully, and I still regularly stand in my kitchen unsure whether I am helping or making it worse.

What struck me most is how honestly the assessment documents what the state does not know. The headline cost estimate of about $432 per ton is labeled low confidence, built on roughly 100 usable data points, because most providers did not submit cost and tonnage data and the data that arrived was not defined consistently. The April request for information drew 30 responses statewide. I do not read this as a failure of effort by Ecology. I read it as a system that has never been required to be measurable. My first request is that the full needs assessment treat consistent, defined, mandatory reporting as core infrastructure, not an aspiration. If residents can be asked to sort correctly, providers can be asked to report in consistent categories.

Second, please measure outcomes, not just capture. Table 13 counts material by the stream it was collected in. That means a cardboard box counts as recycled the moment it enters my recycling cart, even if the processing facility later rejects it as residue and landfills it. The state currently knows what it picks up far better than what actually gets remade. The full assessment should track materials through processing to end markets wherever that is feasible, and say plainly where it is not.

Third, on glass: thank you for keeping glass bottles and containers on the residential list. Please settle the collection mode question early rather than late. And please plan for end market fragility, not just collection. When the Ardagh plant in Seattle closed in 2024, communities across the region paused glass collection because the local furnace was gone. Washington now has one in-state glass end market. A statewide list that assumes glass will be collected is only as strong as the market that takes it.

Fourth, the capture gaps deserve as much attention as the lists. About 43 percent of PET bottles and 35 percent of glass bottles were collected in garbage, and curbside recycling is available to only 29 percent of multifamily residences in the Eastern region and 23 percent in the Central region. These are access and design problems, not resident apathy. Where drop-off is the answer, as with plastic film on the alternative collection list, the drop-off points have to be findable, convenient, and actually connected to an end market. Table 14 shows what happens otherwise: about 92 percent of self-hauled cardboard was collected as garbage.

Fifth, compostable packaging needs a processing plan to match the collection plan. Only five composting facilities statewide accept certified compostable packaging, and composters reasonably fear losing organic certification and farm markets if they accept it. Putting compostables on a statewide list without resolving that conflict sets residents up to do the right thing into a system that cannot receive it.

Finally, refill and reuse: the assessment identified 15 zero-waste retail locations and counted bulk grocery in a broader figure, but could not say how much material moves through any of it. Every PCC and Town & Country in my area has a bulk section where I refill my own containers. Before the state sets reuse targets, it needs a baseline built on something better than desktop research.

Residents are not the disengaged party in this report. We are the ones standing in the kitchen trying to get it right. Build a system that measures itself as carefully as it asks us to sort, and we will meet it more than halfway and help hold businesses and other parts of the system accountable.

Kind regards and thank you for your work,
Meaghan Fitzgerald, Seattle