COUNTY OF ERIE

MARK C. POLONCARZ

COUNTY EXECUTIVE

September 29, 2015

Hon. Maggie Brooks
Monroe County Executive's Office
110 County Office Building
39 W. Main St.
Rochester, NY 14614

Re: Banning of Microbeads

Dear County Executive Brooks:

I recently learned that the Monroe County Legislature is studying the issue of microbeads and their long-term effects on the health of our Great Lakes watershed and the life that depends on it. As you may be aware, on August 12 of this year, I signed into law legislation passed unanimously with bi-partisan support by our county legislature banning the sale of products containing microbeads in Erie County. Additionally, last week the Chautauqua County Legislature passed a similar ban, which Chautauqua County Executive Vince Horrigan has indicated he will sign into law after the requisite notice and public meeting period has passed. I am writing today to share some of my personal experience with this issue and urge you to support your proposed local law.

I am sure you have been advised about the environmental havoc that microbeads cause, but in case not, microbeads are very tiny bits of plastic added to many personal care and cosmetic products that are so small they cannot be removed from our water by water treatment facilities. As a result, they are dumped back into the source of our drinking water, thereby accumulating in water, and often are ingested by fish and aquatic life. This can poison not only the fish and other aquatic life ingesting them but all other living organisms that depend on our waterways for sustenance – including our own residents who often eat what they have caught in our waterways.

Microbeads have been found in the stomachs of fish and in the sands on our beaches, posing a clear and present danger to our health and posterity that cannot be ignored. Because our water treatment facilities cannot filter out these tiny bits of plastic, approximately 19 tons of them are finding their way into our lakes and streams each year. This is not sustainable, and I hope that you will stand with me to stop the spread of these toxic plastics.

Although this is primarily an environmental and health issue, the damage caused by microbeads will have long-lasting economic consequences as well. The Great Lakes watershed is home to world-class fresh water fishing, a billion-dollar industry that relies on clean water and healthy fish to attract anglers from around the world. We also remember the dark years of the past, when our economic prosperity was undercut by polluted water that could not support recreation or, consequently, business. Correcting the polluting ways of the past took cooperation across many years and between many governmental agencies, but today Erie County is home to a resurgent waterfront district, Canalside, that draws hundreds of thousands of visitors throughout the year to enjoy recreation and family activities of all kinds. However, ignoring the danger of microbeads imperils all the advances we have made and risks a return to those days.

Along with the Erie County Legislature, I realized that the answer to this pressing issue was not forthcoming from Albany or from Washington, D.C., as microbead legislation has stalled in both of those houses. Action is needed at the local level, and as we are seeing from the positive statewide response to our initial passage of this legislation, municipalities are eager to act.

I believe it is in these moments where our leadership is defined. These tiny plastic bits will long outlive our time in office, but our action today will mean that our children and grandchildren live in a cleaner environment.

The local response to our legislation has been positive, and my office has not heard from any storeowner, constituent, or local distributor saying that banning microbeads would cause detriment to their business. However, prior to my signing of the legislation into law, for weeks my office received multiple letters and inquiries from special interest lobbyists representing large cosmetic companies, very few if any of whom are from WNY, know WNY or even truly understand the importance of our region to the people who live here. They do not care about the impact microbeads have on our region's environment – the place we call home.

However, for all of us who call Western New York and the Finger Lakes region our home, the Great Lakes our back yard, and all our waterways our heritage, I urge you to join the statewide movement and ban microbeads in your county. Now is the time to act to preserve a clean legacy for future generations.

Sincerely yours,

Mark C. Poloncarz, Esq.
Erie County Executive

MCP/jr

cc: Erie County Legislature
Monroe County Legislature
New York State Association of Counties
New York State County Executives Association