



---

## **GW Environmental Justice Action Network**

### **Subject: Petition for a Comprehensive, Enforceable, and Transparent GW Waste Management and Composting Plan**

Dear Members of the GW Administration,

We, as members of the George Washington University community, are writing to demand immediate, structural reform of GW's waste management and composting systems. As a leading institution that publicly identifies sustainability as a core pillar, GW has a responsibility to ensure that its operational practices align with its stated environmental commitments. At present, they do not.

Through observation, documentation, and direct engagement with Dining and Facilities teams, we have identified systemic failures in GW's waste diversion infrastructure. These failures undermine trust, contribute to environmental harm, and constitute environmental greenwashing. We call on the administration to implement the following measures.

#### **1. Phase Out the Plastic-Based Dispatch Goods System in Favor of Campus-Wide Composting**

- GW Dining promotes the Dispatch Goods reusable container system as a “zero-waste” solution. While we acknowledge that container return rates have increased from 20% (reported February 6, 2026) to an estimated 80% (reported February 20, 2026), this system does not adequately reduce waste. Dispatch Goods—*plastic* containers—routinely enter the waste stream instead of designated collection points, as seen in Figures 4–15. Students have observed them in public trash receptacles, residence halls, and even on campus streets, contributing to plastic pollution. Therefore, we demand that **GW make composting—not plastic reuse systems—the cornerstone of our future waste strategy**. While Dispatch Goods is not a failure of zero-waste systems, it fails due to communication gaps and weak infrastructure. Additionally, it depends on student participation in an inconvenient container return process.

Compostable materials, when paired with a functional collection and processing system, present a more scalable solution with lower material risk.

- We also request a clear carbon emissions analysis comparing reusable plastic containers with compostable containers. This study should measure the total emissions created from making, transporting, washing, and reusing the plastic containers versus producing, transporting, and composting single-use compostable products.

## **2. End the Mixing of Landfill, Recycling, and Compost Waste at District House, Dining Halls, All Restrooms, and the USC**

- We have obtained clear photo (Figure 6) and [Video Evidence](#) that **after disposal, waste is routinely mixed in District House and the University Student Center**. Regardless of placement in landfill, recycling, or compost bins, waste is indiscriminately combined upon collection. This practice renders upstream sorting ineffective and diverts *all* waste to landfills. Such oversight is unacceptable for an institution that claims sustainability leadership. We demand:
  - An immediate end to post-collection waste mixing
  - Updated training to all custodial workers, guided by the Office of Sustainability
  - A monthly custodial training schedule for proper waste management practices
  - Public disclosure of waste hauling and sorting procedures
  - Written guarantees that recycling and compost streams are kept intact through final processing
- Without these assurances, GW's waste infrastructure will remain deceptive and functionally broken.

### **2a. Implement Mandatory Custodial Training and a Color-Coded Bag System**

- GW cannot achieve proper waste management without trained staff and standardized systems. As previously stated, custodial staff *must* be trained on waste-sorting and compost procedures, with mandatory, recurring training overseen by the Office of Sustainability. However, we must also make waste collection easier. Therefore, we demand the adoption of **distinct, color-coded bags**, including:
  - Black bags for landfill waste
  - Blue bags for recycling
  - Green bags for compost

- Color-coded bags have been successfully implemented at Georgetown University, as seen in Figure 2, demonstrating that such infrastructure is both feasible and effective at local institutions.
- [This study](#) by Busch Systems details how consistent color-coding helps the waste-sorting process.

## **2b. Redesign Waste Bin Layouts and Instructions to Prevent Contamination**

- GW's current waste stations are marked by unclear signage, inconsistent labeling, and poor bin placement as seen in Figure 3, enabling the widespread contamination of waste streams. We demand a comprehensive redesign of waste station layouts. GW must utilize **clear, item-specific signage** indicating what products are compostable, recyclable, or landfill-bound. These layouts must be standardized across campus. Further, our waste stations should be modeled after those of American University (Figure 1), as AU's waste management infrastructure consistently outperforms GW's in clarity, diversion rates, and compliance.
- In Initiative #6, the [GW Road Map to Zero Waste](#) pledges to “continue to update and replace lids and signage” as a tool for reducing waste contamination. GW must uphold its stated commitment to this zero waste goal.

## **2c. Require GW Dining to Publicly Disclose Item-Level Waste Classifications**

- We demand that **GW Dining publish an inventory of all disposable dining products, classifying each item as compostable, recyclable, or landfill waste**. This inventory must be accessible to the public via the Dining website and QR codes on all waste stations. As supplies and their sources fluctuate, this inventory must be *regularly updated*. The Environmental Justice Action Network and the Office of Sustainability will independently verify these classifications to ensure accountability and accurate representation.

## **2d. Establish a Student-Staffed Compost Team Through the Office of Sustainability**

- If Facilities operations do not have the capacity to properly manage compost streams, the solution is not abandonment—it is *investment*. We demand the **creation of a paid compost team housed within the Office of Sustainability**, modeled after successful programs at American University. This team will manage compost collection points, preventing contamination and properly managing compost sent to external facilities.
- Alongside this exported compost, we demand the expansion of on-campus composting programs. Such programs, also managed by the compost team, will enable students to convert

personal food waste to usable soil. Students demonstrate preparedness and enthusiasm to execute these programs. In fact, students from the GroW Community Garden have successfully managed a student composting system for one year, as seen in Figures 21–22. Their program supplies compost using low-cost inputs such as bins, worms, cardboard, and food waste, demonstrating the feasibility of this solution.

- Compost collection sites should be located in public outdoor areas, such as Square 80, Medical center, U-Yard, and Potomac Square to supplement the existing bin in Kogan Plaza.

### **3. Enforce GW’s Single-Use Plastics Policy Without Exception**

- Despite GW’s stated [Single-Use Plastics Policy](#), nearly all campus dining locations integrate single-use plastic products. Figures 17–20 illustrate single-use plastics across campus, even polluting the GroW Community Garden. This constitutes a direct violation of university policy. We demand that all dining locations immediately eliminate single-use plastics from food service. All dining leases must be amended to ban single-use plastics in all establishments. Further, we demand that any vendor found in violation of this policy be barred from university P-card use by upper faculty. If enforcement of product procurement is deemed unfeasible, fines must be imposed for each documented violation. Compostable materials *must* be adopted as the baseline standard for all locations, including dining halls, when dishwashers fail.

### **4. Ensure Consistent Support for Food Recovery Operations**

- The [Food Recovery Network](#) (FRN), part of the Office of Sustainability, struggles to conduct routine food recoveries at dining halls due to difficulty maintaining contact with dining staff and chefs. This primarily occurs because of high staff turnover. As a result, recoveries have ceased at Thurston Dining Hall since Fall 2025 and Shenkman Dining Hall since Spring 2026, limiting the amount of food directed away from the waste stream and toward individuals in need. Dining services must establish clear coordination protocols with FRN, including designated staff contacts and continuity plans during staff transitions, to ensure consistent food recoveries.

### **5. Publicly Disclose University Waste Production**

- Transparency is key to accountability. We demand that GW publicly disclose the amount of waste it generates in a detailed, yearly, or monthly report to the GW community. This report must include landfill, recycling, and compost data, stating how much waste was diverted from landfills.

## **6. Disclose All Funding Related to Dining Halls, Composting, and Waste Management**

- We demand that GW publish a detailed report on the allocation of funds toward dining services, waste management, and composting initiatives for all students to observe. Publicizing this information will enable students to ensure accountability and advocate for necessary improvements.

### **6a. Publicize GW's Dining Services Contract With Chartwells and Dispatch Goods**

- We demand student access to view the university's contract with Chartwells, its dining service provider, and Dispatch Goods. This essential transparency will enable students to understand policies regarding food sourcing, worker conditions, and sustainability commitments.

### **6b. Properly Consult the Office of Sustainability on Future Sustainability-Related Projects**

- Before the Dispatch Goods contract was signed, students and other university stakeholders should have had the opportunity to help brainstorm ways to make eliminating single-use plastics and reducing waste a structural part of GW Dining. However, EJAN and the GW community were unaware of the long-term contract with Dispatch Goods until GW Dining had already finalized the agreement. There was no meaningful opportunity for stakeholder engagement in shaping the rollout of a brand-new waste system; the process only began after the contract was signed. As a result, preemptive concerns could not be raised or addressed in any meaningful way. To avoid any more of these instances, all relevant parties must communicate with the Office of Sustainability throughout the entire process of future sustainability initiatives.

## **7. Acknowledge Student Consensus and the Financial Case for Reform**

- These demands reflect widely held concerns across the student body. Fixing GW's broken waste management system represents an opportunity to move beyond symbolic sustainability and toward measurable, honest environmental stewardship. We urge the administration to treat this petition with the seriousness it warrants. By April 3rd, we request a formal written response outlining a clear implementation plan and timeline. Continued inaction will only deepen the gap between GW's stated values and its operational reality.

Sincerely,

**GW Environmental Justice Action Network**

gwu.ejan@gmail.com

## Appendix

Figure 1: American University Bins



Figure 2: Georgetown Bins

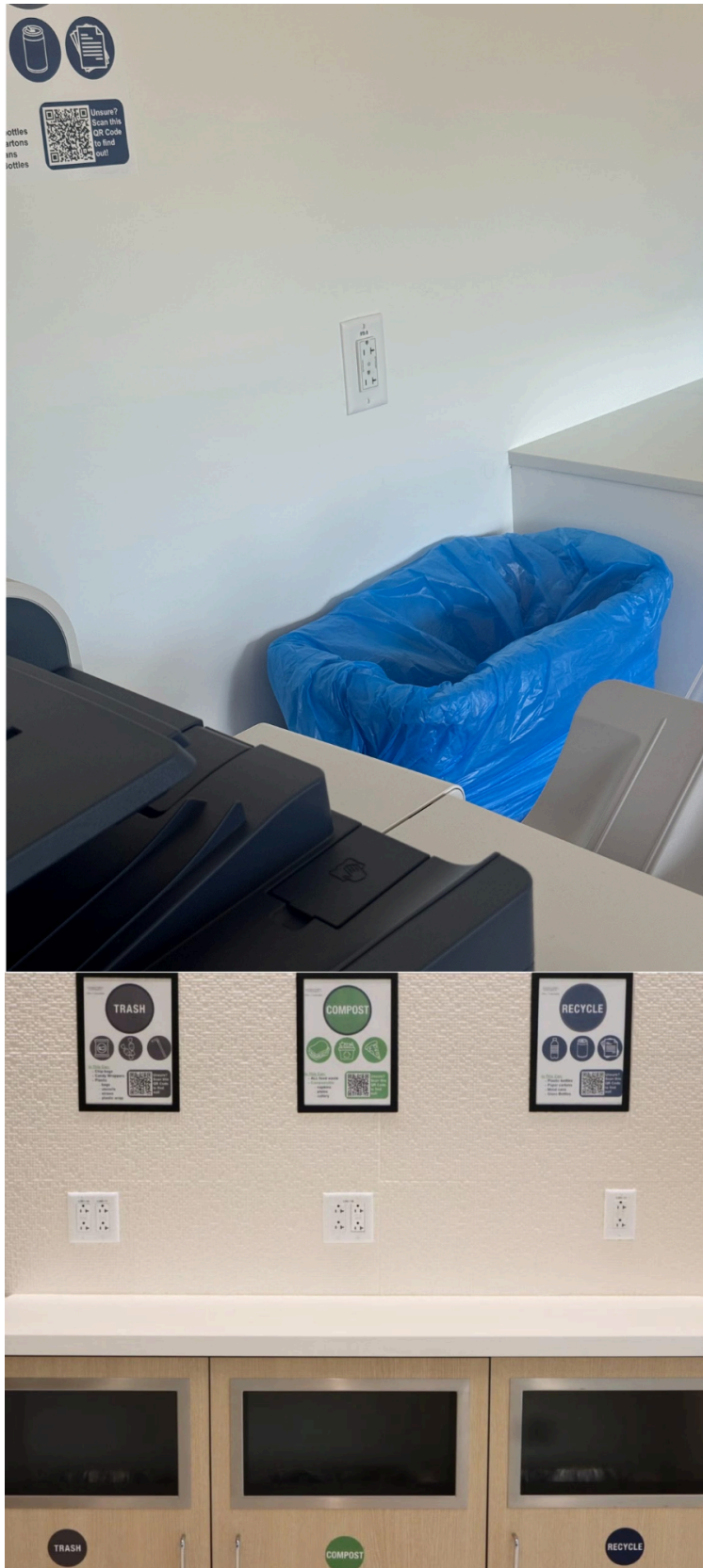


Figure 3: Poor USC Bin Design



Figure 4: Dispatch Goods in USC Recycling Bin



Figure 5: Dispatch Goods in Panera trash slot

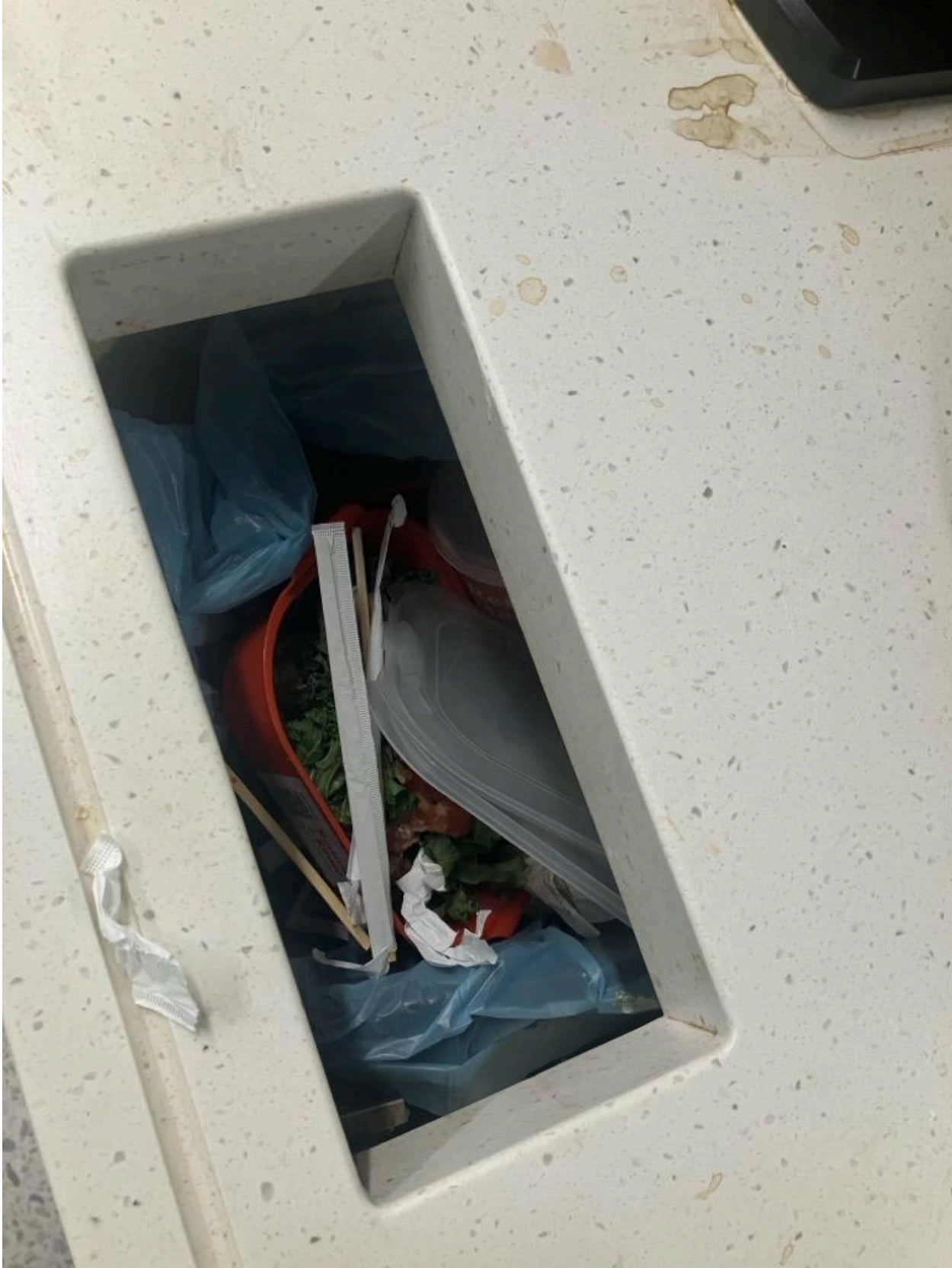


Figure 6: Dispatch Bag mixed with other Waste

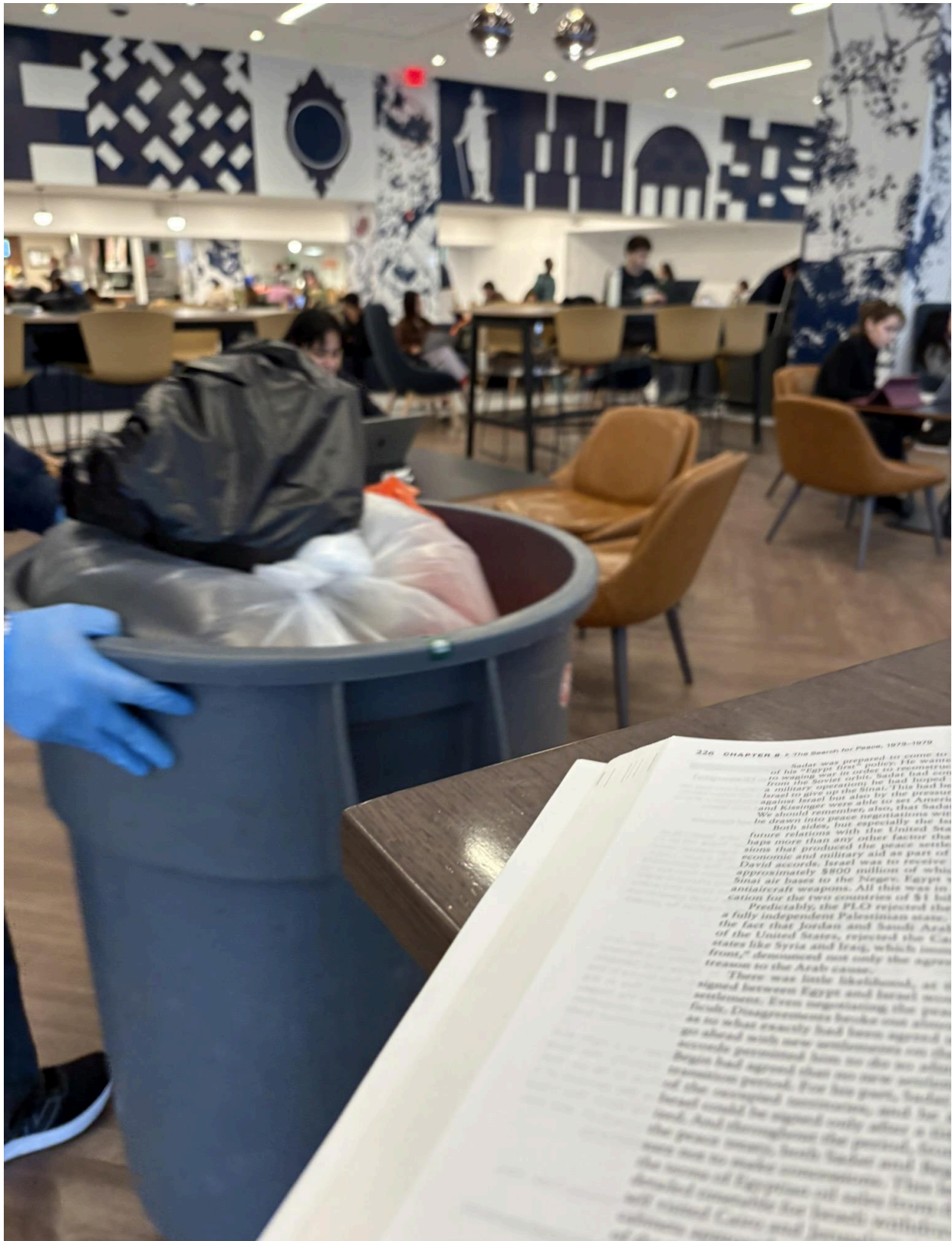


Figure 7: Dispatch Goods Outside Vex Bus Stop



Figure 8: Dispatch Goods left Behind on Street Bin



Figure 9: Dispatch Goods at Casta's Rum Bar



Figure 10: Dispatch Goods in USC Trash Bin Along with Plastic Cup Toppers



Figure 11: Overflowing Dispatch Goods Bin



Figure 12: Dispatch Goods In Science and Engineering Hall Study room Bin



Figure 13: Dispatch Goods Smashed on Street



Figure 14: Dispatch Goods In Gelman Trash Can



Figure 15: Dispatch Goods InDistrict House



Figure 16: Paper towels in a black plastic non-compostable bag



Figure 17: Contaminated Compost with Plastic, Chick-fil-A, and various Plastics in USC



Figure 18: Contaminated USC/District House Compost



Figure 19 Panda Express Pollution in GW Grow Garden



Figure 20: Overflowing Sushi-DO Bin with Plastic and Compostables Mixed together



Figure 21-22: GW Grow Garden Compost

New compost bins are in!  
Red wiggler compost worms will  
help speed things up!



