



## NEWS RELEASE

### Congressional Briefing Sheds Light on Crucial Fashion Industry Topics and Opportunities Amid New York Fashion Week's Kickoff

**WASHINGTON DC, September 7, 2023** — As the fashion industry's major players gear up for the kickoff of this season's New York Fashion Week, sustainable and ethical fashion leaders have turned their attention away from the runway and onto pressing policy challenges facing the fashion industry.

On Thursday, September 7, at noon EST, the American Circular Textiles (ACT) group, PoliticallyinFashion, Rebecca Ballard Advisory, Transparentem, and TS Designs hosted a first of its kind congressional briefing to educate staffers on critical issues facing the fashion industry and share potential solutions.

The briefing addressed several pressing topics, including challenges and solutions around forced labor in fashion supply chains, the opportunity of regenerative and circular fashion and the broader ethical and environmental impact of the industry. These subjects were presented and discussed in-depth, emphasizing the need for immediate public policy action.

The speakers of this briefing included sustainable and fashion leaders Rachel Kibbe of American Circular Textiles (ACT), Hilary Jochmans of PoliticallyinFashion, Rebecca Ballard of Rebecca Ballard Advisory, E. Benjamin Skinner of Transparentem, and Eric Henry of TS Designs.

The briefing outlined the substantial domestic economic opportunities in supporting a more responsible industry as well as potential policy strategies to enforce them. In bolstering circular business models, Kibbe suggested policy strategies that both improve the recyclability of textiles while fueling U.S. jobs and the economy. Some of these policy solutions included Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR) for textiles and second-hand sales and use tax exemptions. These strategies showcased how thoughtful policy measures can play a pivotal role in mitigating ethical and environmental concerns while simultaneously promoting economic growth within the fashion sector.

“Textile waste is the nation’s fastest growing waste stream and it’s coming at the cost of both the environment and the U.S. taxpayers who have to pay for clothes to be burned and hauled to our overflowing landfills,” said Kibbe. “This doesn’t need to be the case. There is a world in which both textile reuse and recycling can be as, or more, accessible than other household waste streams. But this can only happen if the fashion industry and policymakers collaborate on supportive policy that supports the infrastructure, logistics, market dynamics and innovation required to transition from linear to circular systems”

The speakers also emphasized how the specific ethical and sustainability challenges in the fashion industry impact the American people. Ballard outlined the extent of forced labor in fashion as well as current U.S. laws and policies combating forced labor and how they affect this industry. With Skinner, Ballard outlined potential strategy solutions to address the ongoing problem.

“You can’t compete with products made with forced labor in the marketplace,” said Ballard. “The United States has the strictest laws of any country banning imports made with forced labor, and it is the only country with both civil and criminal penalties. However forced labor is on the rise globally...There are so many solutions to combating forced labor in fashion which can be scaled. For example, the Dindigul Agreement, which brought together fashion companies, a clothing and textile supplier, and labor organizations, just reached the one year mark and resulted in the fastest release of a Withhold Release Order (WRO) ever.”

Fashion is a multi-billion dollar industry that transcends national and man-made borders, employing hundreds of thousands in a variety of industries. “It is critical that industry be aware of the myriad of laws and regulations domestically and internationally in the areas of agriculture, chemicals, intellectual property, manufacturing, recycling, wage regulation, tariffs, trade, transportation, among others, that have a direct impact on their businesses” Jochmans said.

As the fashion industry stands at a crossroads, the insights gained from this briefing are expected to inform and inspire future policy initiatives that promote ethical, sustainable, and economically robust fashion practices.

## **ABOUT AMERICAN CIRCULAR TEXTILES**

Founded in 2022 by [Circular Services Group](#), the [American Circular Textiles \(ACT\)](#) is a coalition of leading fashion organizations aligned on responsible domestic circularity and sustainable fashion public policy, with an emphasis on apparel and footwear reuse and recycling. ACT operates under the belief that systemic and scalable change in fashion requires industry players to hold hands and develop a collective voice. The coalition aims to facilitate a transition from a linear to a circular fashion economy, educate and raise awareness around the fashion industry’s current gap in sustainability practices, and to advocate for responsible public policy solutions.

## **ABOUT POLITICALLY IN FASHION**

Founded in 2020, by former Hill staffer, Hilary Jochmans, PoliticallyInFashion is an engagement community for all those in fashion – brands, designers, manufacturers, artisans, retailers,

models, lawyers, reporters, and consumers – to learn about legislative and regulatory issues of key importance to the industry. The mission is to educate individuals on public policy; and empower them with this knowledge; to then engage with elected representatives on how these issues impact companies and consumers.

## **ABOUT REBECCA BALLARD ADVISORY**

Founded in 2011, [Rebecca Ballard Advisory](#) bridges people, systems, resources, and organizations to transform the impact of the fashion industry from exploitation to empowerment. They improve the social and environmental impact of fashion companies across a range of areas including product development and production, supply chains through all tiers, business management and operations, internal and external communications, and logistics. Rebecca Ballard Advisory also specializes in creating and cultivating win-win partnerships across the private, public, and social sectors.

## **ABOUT TRANSPARENTEM**

[Transparentem](#) is an investigative non-profit that advances the well-being of workers, children, and communities by exposing hard truths to those with the power to transform industries. Through strategic engagement with major brands connected to their investigative findings, the organization compels companies to remedy grave human rights and environmental abuses in their supply chains—and lead on industry-wide change. Founded in 2015 by award-winning journalist E. Benjamin Skinner, Transparentem's focus to date has been on the \$1.7T global apparel, footwear, and accessories industries.

## **ABOUT TS DESIGNS**

TS Designs in Burlington, NC has a vision to make the highest quality printed apparel in a domestic, transparent, and trackable supply chain.

It began in 1991 with the ratification of NAFTA, when the majority of their clients moved t-shirt printing abroad. Rather than go out of business they chose the triple bottom line business model focused on People, the Planet, and Profits, that aligned with their values... and they were in fact the first certified apparel B Corporation in the state of North Carolina over a decade ago.

Innovative efforts include: 1. Developed a truly Dirt to Shirt™ tee with all made-in-the-USA manufacturing supply chains; 2. Garment dyeing techniques encompassing reactive and natural dyes; 3. Promoting natural fibers such as cotton and hemp; 4. Developed the eco-friendly water-based print process REHANCE™.

Eric Henry, TS Designs President, consistently strives for the importance of transparency of supply chain. He worked to develop the system, [whereyourclothing.com](#), that allows the consumer to know all the steps in the supply chain of their t-shirt, from the farmers who grow the cotton to the folks who sew the cloth together. Just scan the QR code in the pad printed neck label of each shirt!

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