



THE MARYLAND HOUSE OF DELEGATES
ANNAPOLIS, MARYLAND 21401

HB 296

Good Afternoon Chair Davis, Vice Chair Dumais, members of the Economic Matters Committee. HB 296, with my amendment, would ban plastic straws at restaurants.

Last year I presented HB 134, which would have simply flipped the paradigm. Instead of sitting down at a restaurant and having the server automatically give you a plastic straw, it said you may have a plastic straw if you ask for one. And it included a number of exceptions. Since then I have done more research, looked at different jurisdictions' laws in Maryland, and re-watched last year's hearing. And I came to the conclusion that we really just need to get rid of plastic straws.

While HB 296 as drafted is the same as last year, I have submitted an amendment that would ban plastic straws & stirrers at Food Service Businesses. In so doing, I am taking the lead of Prince George's County, which banned them in 2019, Charles County, which banned them in 2018, and Montgomery County, which banned them in 2015. I used the language from Prince George's and Charles County for my amendment.

Why plastic straws? One estimate suggests that 500 million straws are used every single day in the U.S. That is enough to circle the earth 25 times. They are one of the most common items found in shoreline cleanups. They are one of the top 10 trash items found in the world's oceans.

It is estimated that the average person uses approximately 1.5 straws per day. Most of us don't need them and don't even think about it, we just accept the straw given to us and use it. So if every member of the General Assembly stopped using plastic straws just for session, that would be 25,380 plastic straws eliminated. If all 188 of us stopped for the whole year, that would be 102,930 plastic straws gone.

While plastic straws are technically recyclable, many people don't realize they are so don't recycle them. And when they are recycled, because they are so small & lightweight, they often don't make it through the mechanical recycling sorter. So they end up as litter, in our neighborhoods, along our shorelines, and in the oceans.

Many jurisdictions in Maryland - Prince George's County, Charles County, Montgomery County, Garrett Park, the City of Rockville and Takoma Park - have banned plastic straws. And several other jurisdictions, including Annapolis and Ocean City, have undergone massive education campaigns to get rid of plastic straws.

Maryland is not alone: the United Kingdom has banned plastic straws & stirrers. California, Vermont, Oregon & DC have also banned straws. Areas in Arizona, Colorado, Florida, Massachusetts, Montana, Nevada, New Jersey, New York, Utah, Virginia, and Washington. Airlines, restaurants, hotels, cruise lines, amusement parks, National Parks, and stores are all moving away from plastic straws.

I encourage you to add the State of Maryland to this growing list by giving HB 296 a favorable report.