



HB 296 - Environment - Single-Use Plastic Straws - Use in a Food Service Business
Economic Matters
February 19, 2020
Position: Favorable

Environment Maryland is a citizen-based environmental advocacy organization. We work to protect clean air, clean water, and open space. We have thousands of members across the state and are based in Baltimore.

Maryland PIRG's mission is to deliver persistent, result-oriented public interest activism that protects consumers, encourages a fair, sustainable economy, and fosters responsive, democratic government. We are a Baltimore based, statewide, non-partisan, non-profit, citizen-funded public interest advocacy organization with members across the state.

Chairman Davis and Members of the Committee:

We want to thank the General Assembly for its leadership in reducing plastic pollution through a ban on foam food packaging, and we hope this can be the year we can continue that work with HB 296.

This ban will help fight the plastic pollution crisis, it will reduce waste, protect our climate, save our state money in clean up costs, and it is common sense public policy.

Reduce Waste:

Nothing we use for a few minutes should be allowed to pollute our communities and the Bay for hundreds of years—especially when we don't really need it. We are drowning in plastic, and this bill is an excellent step in turning off the tap.

Reduce pollution:

Plastic pollution poisons our air and water, litters our neighborhoods, and poses a fatal threat to wildlife. Because of their size, plastic straws are largely unrecyclable - instead,

they end up in our landfills, incinerators and in our waterways and neighborhoods.

[Environment Maryland's 2019 report on recycling](#) in Maryland showed that for every metric ton of plastic burned in an incinerator, 1,980 pounds of carbon dioxide (CO₂) equivalent are released.¹

The public health effects of incineration are also grave. Emissions include carcinogens and neurotoxins, as well as contaminants that can cause or aggravate respiratory problems, particularly among children, the elderly, and those with pre-existing respiratory problems.²

Much of our plastic pollution ends up in our water where it breaks down into a sort of plastic 'soup' that is easily ingested by wildlife. For a bird or fish or turtle, it's easy to mistake a small piece of plastic for food—especially when there are millions of pieces of plastic floating in our waterways. Scientists have found plastic fragments in literally hundreds of species, including 86% of all sea turtle species, 44% of all seabird species, and 43% of all marine mammal species. Ingesting these fragments is often fatal. Animals starve when they ingest too much plastic that they can't digest.

Every year, 8 million tons of plastic pollution enters our oceans and waterways. Our water in Maryland is not spared from the pervasiveness of plastic pollution. In 2015, NOAA's Marine Debris Program revealed that there is a significantly high concentration of microplastics in the waters of the Chesapeake Bay. Researchers in those studies predicted that Baltimore's growth over the next few years would further contribute to this pollution - 4 years later, we know they were right.³

Protect our climate:

Plastic is made from fossil fuels. The more plastic that is manufactured, the more fossil fuels we consume. According to National Geographic about 8 percent of the world's oil production is used to make plastic and power the manufacturing of it. That figure is projected to rise to 20 percent by 2050.⁴ Every part of a single-use plastic's lifespan emits greenhouse gases. From production to shipping to disposal, single-use plastics make it

¹ "The State of Recycling in Maryland", Environment Maryland and US PIRG, 2019.

² Ibid.

³ NOAA Marine Debris Program. "Analysis of Microplastics in Chesapeake Bay and Coastal Mid-Atlantic Water Samples

<https://marinedebris.noaa.gov/research/analysis-microplastics-chesapeake-bay-and-coastal-mid-atlantic-water-samples>

⁴ Fast facts about plastic pollution. Laura Parker. National Geographic, Dec 20, 2018.

<https://www.nationalgeographic.com/news/2018/05/plastics-facts-infographics-ocean-pollution/>

increasingly less likely that we will stay beneath the 1.5 degree celsius threshold. If we fail to do that, we will be unable to mitigate the worst impacts of climate change.

Save money:

Cleaning up plastic waste and cleaning it out of storm drains, among other places, costs money. By reducing pollution, we can reduce cleanup costs.

Furthermore, we know that the catastrophic impacts of climate change are going to be costly. We need to take immediate action to cut down on our plastic production and consumption in order to meet our climate goals.

Good public policy: Businesses, cities, states and countries across the globe are taking up the issue of plastic pollution. Plastic pollution is a crisis and we need to act on it now.

We respectfully request a favorable report on HB0296.