



Date: February 11, 2020

Bill: HB209 – Plastics and Packaging Reduction Act

Position: Support

Contact:

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Dear Chairman Barve and Members of the Committee:

The National Aquarium respectfully requests your support for **House Bill 209 – Plastics and Packaging Reduction Act**, which will limit the harmful impact plastic bags have on neighborhoods and wildlife across Maryland, and create a workgroup to discuss comprehensive statewide solutions to the pollution and proliferation of single-use products. The National Aquarium believes that plastic pollution is an issue we can stop in our lifetime. This bill is an important step in making that a reality.

An estimated 8 million metric tons of plastic enters the ocean each year; that is equivalent to at least one dump truck full of plastic entering the ocean every minute. Once in the environment, plastic debris breaks down into smaller pieces, but they never completely disappear. This plastic debris, including plastic bags, is a hazard for wildlife and habitats, as animals may confuse plastic pieces for food. Over half of all marine mammal species have been impacted by plastic pollution and it is estimated more than 90% of seabirds will ingest plastic by 2050.

On average, the lifespan of a plastic bag is 12 minutes. The flimsiness that makes plastic bags cheap and plentiful also makes them virtually unrecyclable. When that bag is discarded, it will almost certainly not be recycled. It will go into a landfill, be incinerated or end up in the environment. Plastic bags are easily blown by the wind and end up in trees, rivers, the Chesapeake Bay, and eventually our one, interconnected ocean.

There is ample evidence from around the world that eliminating plastic bags from checkout aisles is an effective way to dramatically reduce the harmful impacts of bags on our environment. If this bill passes, Maryland will join a growing number of states and communities across the country to recognize this is a serious problem with an easily recognizable solution.

Equally important to removing plastic bags from checkout aisles, a price floor for alternative bags, such as paper, is necessary to begin to change public behavior. Without a price floor, the state would be replacing plastic litter with paper litter. Only by changing attitudes and behavior will we begin to address the root causes of plastic pollution. Consumers can easily avoid paying any additional price by using a reusable bag.

If current practices continue, plastic input into the ocean is expected to double by 2025. The best way to stop or reverse this trend is through a comprehensive and holistic solution. The National Aquarium defines a comprehensive solution using four key approaches: stop plastic pollution at its source; change behaviors; clean up existing plastic pollution; and provide education and outreach. The workgroup established by this bill is necessary to study how the state can use these approaches to responsibly address the growing problem of plastic pollution and reliance on single-use products.

As part of the National Aquarium's mission *to inspire conservation of the world's aquatic treasures*, we take seriously our responsibility to educate our visitors and the surrounding community about the negative impact plastic pollution has on the health of people, wildlife and ecosystems. HB 209 is a critical step in the right direction because it will eliminate one of the most prevalent and harmful forms of plastic pollution and create a workgroup to study how the state manages single-use products. **We urge the Committee to vote in favor of House Bill 209.**