

TESTIMONY ON HB 209
Position: FAVORABLE
February 11, 2020
ENT & ECM Committees

Chairmen Barve, Davis, and Members of the Committees:

We support the Plastics and Packaging Reduction Act (HB 209) which will ban the point-of-sale hand-out of plastic bags in our state.

First of all, we want to thank the General Assembly for its leadership in reducing plastic pollution through a ban on foam food packaging last year. We are confident in your leadership in supporting a bag ban that is good for the planet and good for all Marylanders.

Faith leaders are increasingly concerned about the throw-away culture of our society.

- The culture that idolizes economic gain at the expense of the poor, the environment, and future generations.
- The culture that seems to have forgotten that there's something seriously wrong with extracting fossil fuels that have been in the ground for millions of years in order to produce a plastic bag that will be used once and thrown away.
- The culture that expects jurisdictions to pay to remove unsightly trash from parkways, rivers, and tree branches, simply because we feel it is inconvenient to be asked to stop using plastic bags. The economic harm caused to jurisdictions for having to clean up these shared spaces takes away from the economic good our jurisdictions could be investing in instead.

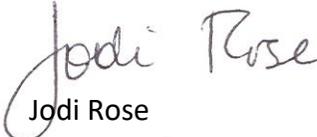
In congregations operating on the margins of society, the most commonly reported environmental problem they struggle with is oppressive trash in their neighborhoods and local streams. This plastic waste is what our marginalized neighbors see when they go out for a walk.

There are many complex pollution problems in Maryland, and this is one solution in which everyone can participate. A ban on plastic bags is easy to understand and applies to everyone without bias.

With that being said, we have concerns with how this bill could affect the poor when they go to purchase food. Our dedication to environmental healing is rooted in deep love and respect for all people. While doing the *right* thing, like choosing not to use cheaply-made plastic bags, costs more, it would be tone-deaf for us to ignore the realities that impoverished Marylanders face. Our concerns with this bill are as follows:

- Financial burdens on low-income consumers are not to be minimalized and real solutions to this problem are needed. However, a WIC/SNAP exemption is mostly likely not the answer because they are not the only consumers who may struggle to purchase paper bags. There are many poor who still do not qualify for WIC/SNAP. We also do not want to create a situation in which entrepreneurial retailers in low-income regions cannot afford to make paper bags available to their customers.
- Historically – and we are *all* to blame for this – we have failed to robustly educate low-income schools and communities on the importance of changing behaviors and moving away from the throw-away culture. This bill fails to create a pathway for energizing community engagement and education in the process of changing behavior, either through community education funding or municipal funding to support educational programming in low-income regions.
- In the spirit of changing behavior, we would encourage further exploration of a phased-in approach in low-income regions to meet everyone where they are at and provide low-income consumers more time to make personal changes in their habits and behaviors regarding one-time bag usage.
- We encourage stronger language in the bill to require that the study-group generate **solutions** to concerns about the impact on low-income consumers. **We owe it to ourselves and future generations to come up with real solutions.** My organization stands ready to assist with that thinking process and to draw in community leaders to ensure we are hearing as many perspectives as possible. True leadership will be achieved when the most diverse thought leaders support the solutions.

We must live in harmony with all of Creation around us, and this legislation encourages us to change our behavior to more closely match what we know in our heart is the right way to live. By reducing access to plastic bags, we will begin to break ourselves of this damaging **addiction to convenience**. IPC envisions a time when using reusable bags will be as second-nature as putting on your seat belt, and when today's throw-away culture is a thing of the past.


Jodi Rose
Executive Director