

HB0209 - Plastics and Packaging Reduction Act

Committees: Environment and Transportation; Economic Matters

Hearing date: February 11, 2020

Lead Sponsor: Delegate Lierman

Position: Favorable

Dear Chairmen Barve and Davis and Members of the Committees:

As a Montgomery County resident and watershed protector, I strongly support HB 209. In my many stream cleanups I have become intimately familiar with plastic of all sorts, from plastic bags caught in trees or on rocks in the stream, to those tiny flakes of plastic embedded in the dirt from bags of years gone by. I also participated in the Sierra Club's survey of carryout bag use at Montgomery and Prince George's counties grocery stores that demonstrated the beneficial effect of the 5 cent bag fee imposed by Montgomery County: reduced bag litter. But our observations showed that many people continued to use plastic carryout bags, whether because they simply accepted the extra cost or because the checkers often did not charge the 5 cents per bag. It appears that if we are serious about zeroing out this form of plastic pollution, we are going to have to ban these bags—and require stores to *sell*, not give, alternative bags, whether made of paper or something else—with a price floor high enough to make people notice.

In the meantime, since the Montgomery County carryout bag fee went into effect in January of 2012, so much more is known about the great harm caused by our addiction to plastic. Worse, we are discovering that what we thought we were recycling, may actually have been dumped on poor communities in Asia or into the ocean. As for bags, which have a questionable second life in the first place, and which many people mistakenly put in their recycling bins, I saw first hand at Montgomery County's transfer station how they clog the mechanism and stop the sorting line. Last year the focus was on expanded polystyrene foam. The next step toward environmental sanity is to ban these plastic bags used only a few minutes and discarded, perhaps to spew their toxins in an incinerator, fly off a land fill, or photodegrade into bits that absorb toxins and can be fatally mistaken for food by seabirds, marine mammals, and fish. Fun fact: we're actually eating plastic in the flesh of fish.¹

A final consideration is that while we and the other creatures of the planet are suffering the health and environmental consequences of plastic *products* everywhere, their *production* is very harmful as well, from the escaping methane and toxic soup involved in fracking to the American communities disrupted by new and leaking pipelines carrying this fracked gas to plastic-making factories here and abroad. Already ships carry our fracked gas to Scotland to

¹ See <https://www.independent.co.uk/environment/plastic-microparticles-fish-flesh-eaten-humans-food-chain-mackerel-anchovy-mullet-a7860726.html>

make plastic pellets--while Scotland has a moratorium on fracking because of its horrible effects. (See <http://www.bbc.com/news/uk-scotland-37474396>, "First US shale gas arrives at Ineos plant in Scotland," 28 September 2016.)

According to an article in Global Citizen,² plastic production will increase by 40% over the next decade, so really drastic action is called for. Maryland was wise to ban fracking. Last year the Maryland Legislature wisely banned expanded polystyrene. Plastic carryout bags are the next low-hanging fruit.

We urge you to follow those wise decisions with a favorable report on HB0209. Thank you for your consideration.



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² [**Plastic Production Is Set to Increase by 40% Over the Next Decade, Experts Say**](#)
"Bringing your fish home in a plastic bag one year and bringing that plastic bag home in a fish the next, is the reality," [said](#) Karmenu Vella, a commissioner at the Ellen MacArthur Foundation.