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TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF SB313

February 20, 2020* Senate Finance Committee

Chairwoman Delores Kelley & Members of the Committee:

I know that you do not often hear from people who live on the Eastern Shore. Therefore, I feel a tremendous urgency to talk to you about this bill.

We have many environmental groups up and down the Shore: *Dorchester Citizens for Planned Growth*, the *Chesapeake Bay Foundation*, the *Sierra Club of the Lower Eastern Shore* (representing Dorchester, Wicomico, Worcester, and Somerset Counties), *Wicomico Environmental Trust (WET)*, *Shore Rivers*, *Assateague Coastal Trust*, *Surfriders*, the *Land Conservancy*, and more. Each of these groups has hundreds of members. In addition, there are a growing number of progressive groups which share the same environmental concerns.

Most of these groups have regularly scheduled litter clean-up days during the year. Our groups gather their members together, usually on a Saturday, to pick up litter on our beaches and waterways. Since I live in Cambridge, I help my friends at Sailwinds Park.

A great deal of this litter consists of plastic bags. Unfortunately, many plastic bags blow away on unreachable surfaces or in the water.

Why do we do this? There are several reasons. We know that littered plastic bags end up in our waterways and our precious Chesapeake Bay. There they degrade into microplastics which absorb toxic chemicals. Our fish and crabs then eat the particles which, of course, poisons them. We have an extraordinarily high cancer rate on the Eastern Shore, and I have no doubt that plastics being ingested by the fish and crabs we eat often in our area of the state contribute to this.

Plastic bags are being ingested by our marine life, suffocating and killing them. Turtles are particularly susceptible to plastic bags because they look like jellyfish. As more and more of these animals wash up on shore or float around in the ocean, our tourism industry is going to suffer.

It is hard for me to understand why people think that using reusable bags at the store is such a burden. I have been using reusable bags since the 1970s. Reusable bags do not have to be anything fancy. Any old bag works just fine. Most of us have canvas or cotton bags of some sort hanging around. Some people even use cardboard boxes.

It is time that all of us recognize that we are in a Climate Crisis. I tend to compare this to the necessary lifestyle changes that were made during World War II. Women went to work en masse; many of them did work that men traditionally had done. Americans gave up certain items and other things were completely unavailable. All Americans were united behind the war effort. I believe it is time our country came together in this fashion again.

There is a growing concern on my side of the Bay Bridge that our legislators are not considering our public health and the deterioration of our environment when they vote on environmental legislation such as this plastic bag ban.

Our Eastern Shore delegates usually vote against this type of legislation, saying that their only concern is small business; however, this bill will only help small business owners. It will not help our tourism industry to have a lot of dead animals drifting onto our beaches. It will not help our watermen either. The crab industry reported record losses last year – at least in Cambridge.

Please look at the big picture this time. Think about a decade from now. Most Americans use at least 300 plastic bags annually. Less than 5% are recycled. In fact, plastic bags often jam recycling machines at great cost to business owners.

Our Cambridge landfill is just about full. Plastic bags do not biodegrade. Each bag has a life expectancy of up to 1,000 years. In a landfill without oxygen, they will probably never degrade. Our town cannot afford to build a new landfill.

What will our Eastern Shore look like if we do not pass this bill? Where will we put the garbage?

I am 67 years old, and I have several medical issues that come with aging. I have less quality time every day. Now that I am retired, I do not want to spend my Saturdays picking up plastic bags and other garbage in our public areas.

I would truly appreciate it if you would vote for this necessary piece of legislation.