

Testimony in Support of Senate Bill 313 –Plastics and Packaging Reduction Act – (Senator Augustine)

February 20, 2020

Dear Chairman Pinsky and Members of the Committee:

Thank you for this opportunity to submit testimony in support of Senate Bill 313 – the ‘Plastics and Packaging Reduction Act’ – on behalf of Waterkeepers Chesapeake. Waterkeepers Chesapeake is a coalition of seventeen Waterkeepers, Riverkeepers, and Coastkeepers working to make the waters of the Chesapeake and Coastal Bays swimmable and fishable. Maryland Waterkeepers have an interest ensuring healthy and thriving aquatic habitats across the state.

Senate Bill 313 seeks to remove single use plastic bags commonly used by retailers and bags that are marketed as “compostable” but do not actually deteriorate in the environment naturally. As much as 80 percent of trash in the oceans comes from sources on land, and up to 60 percent of this trash is plastic. A plastic bag is used for an average of 12 minutes, but can persist in our environment, harm wildlife, and pollute our waterways for 500 years.¹ Single-use bags do not break down completely but instead become microplastics that absorb toxins and further compound the problem.²

The Chesapeake Bay and all of Maryland’s waterways are not immune to this pollution.³ A 2014 study conducted by the University of Maryland found microplastics in four estuary rivers of the Chesapeake Bay.⁴ Additional research conducted at the University of Maryland has shown that the increased presence of plastic in the Chesapeake Bay can cause respiratory stress in Bay

¹ 10 Facts About Single-Use Plastic Bags, *Center for Biological Diversity*, https://www.biologicaldiversity.org/programs/population_and_sustainability/sustainability/plastic_bag_facts.html.

² *Id.*

³ Jeff Corbin, *A Plastic Problem in the Chesapeake Bay*, The EPA Blog (Nov. 24, 2014) <https://blog.epa.gov/2014/11/24/a-plastic-problem-in-the-chesapeake/>.

⁴ Lance T. Yonkos, Elizabeth A. Freidel, et. al., *Microplastics in Four Estuarine Rivers in the Chesapeake Bay, USA*, *Environmental Science & Technology* (Nov. 12, 2014) <https://pubs.acs.org/doi/abs/10.1021/es5036317>.

oyster species.⁵ Out of the water, more than 60% of all seabirds have ingested plastic and that number is expected to rise to 99% in the next 30 years.⁶

The Plastics and Packaging Reduction Act represents a step in the right direction as it encourages waste reduction and positive consumer behavior change. Cities and states in the Chesapeake Bay Watershed and nationally that have passed similar legislation have witnessed positive results. Ten years ago, the District of Columbia passed a similar measure. Cleanup efforts along the Potomac River have recorded a 72 percent reduction in plastic bags being pulled from the waterway since then.⁷

Waterkeepers Chesapeake is a strong proponent of measures that safeguard our waterways, ensure aquatic habitat health, and provide a path for the resurgence of the Chesapeake Bay. For these reasons, the undersigned Waterkeepers, Riverkeepers and Coastkeepers urge the Committee to adopt a favorable report on Senate Bill 313.

Sincerely,

Betsy Nicholas

Executive Director

Waterkeepers Chesapeake

⁵ Whitney Pipkin, *Microplastics are everywhere, but how do they harm the Bay?*, MarylandReporter <https://marylandreporter.com/2019/06/19/microplastics-are-everywhere-but-how-do-they-harm-the-bay/>.

⁶ Caitlyn Johnstone, *What threats do microplastics pose?*, Chesapeake Bay Program (Dec. 12, 2019) https://www.chesapeakebay.net/news/blog/small_plastics_are_a_big_problem.

⁷ Donna Morelli, *Fees and bans reduce plastic pollution, change behavior*, Bay Journal (March 7, 2019) https://www.bayjournal.com/article/fees_and_bans_reduce_plastic_pollution_change_behavior.