



## **SB 223 – Plastic Bag Reduction Act – SUPPORT**

Dear Chairwoman Kelley and Members of the Finance Committee:

Blue Water Baltimore is the watershed-based nonprofit focused on improving water quality and community resilience within Baltimore City and Baltimore County, and home to the Baltimore Harbor Waterkeeper. We respectfully request your support of SB 223 – the Plastic Bag Reduction Act.

Baltimore City is one of the few jurisdictions in the United States with a waterway listed as “impaired” under the Federal Clean Water Act for trash. This means that trash is so prevalent in the streams that empty into the Baltimore Harbor that the Harbor itself is not meeting water quality standards and that significant efforts are necessary to reverse this scenario. Banning single-use, disposable convenience items is one tactic that works well to reduce such items from the waste stream.

Baltimore City led efforts to ban the use of Expanded Polystyrene (EPS) Foam in 2018, that helped persuade State lawmakers to do the same. In 2019, Baltimore City joined other Maryland jurisdictions to ban single-use plastic bags from most restaurants and retail outlets. While implementation of Baltimore’s bag ban has been temporarily delayed due to COVID-19, when implemented, it will not be able to stem the tide of single use plastics – bags and other trash – from entering our waterways from other jurisdictions. It is time for the State to create a statewide ban on single-use plastic bags.

SB 223 would do just this. This bill would ban the use and distribution of plastic bags (less than 4 mils thick) as well as “compostable” plastic bags. This ban will apply to ALL retailers, providing for a few exemptions for uses such as deli meat, produce, newspapers, dry cleaning and fresh flowers. Reliance on jurisdiction-specific plastic bag bans (including Baltimore City’s) has created a patchwork of policies statewide. SB 223 will create continuity among jurisdictions and reduce plastic pollution statewide, by simply banning the use and distribution of plastic bags.

Unlike previous legislative efforts, SB 223 does not dictate alternatives or place a fee on alternatives, which inadvertently disproportionately impacts lower-income residents. Alternatives to single-use plastic bags exist, including a variety of reusable bags, and many retailers throughout Maryland, including grocery chains like Aldi and Lidl, do not offer customers plastic bags currently. Banning the distribution of plastic bags that often end up in tree limbs and along highways and waterways will not cause undue hardship for anyone. But this simple action will result in less plastic bags polluting our environment and our communities.

For these reasons, Blue Water Baltimore, on behalf of our thousands of members and supporters, respectfully requests a FAVORABLE report on SB 223. Thank you.

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