



February 11, 2020

Plastics and Packaging Reduction Act (HB209)

Dear Chairmen Barve and Davis, and Members of the Environment and Transportation and Economic Matters Committees:

Blue Water Baltimore's mission is to restore the quality of Baltimore's rivers, streams and Harbor to foster a healthy environment, a strong economy, and thriving communities. We undertake our work in partnership with many groups and communities across the Baltimore region. **We write today to both support the Plastics and Packaging Reduction Act (HB209) to ban plastic bags in Maryland and to express our concern regarding the potential for disparate impacts on Marylanders experiencing poverty.**

As currently written, the Plastics and Packaging Reduction Act (HB209) would ban plastic bags and impose a ten-cent fee on other bags provided at checkout to encourage customers to bring their own reusable bags when shopping. We fully support this bill's intent to reduce pollution in our streets and streams; we also share the concern that such fees may pose a disparate burden on Marylanders who rely on the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) or the Woman, Infants, and Children (WIC) assistance program to purchase food.

Blue Water Baltimore respectfully requests that the committees explore ways to lessen the impact of this bill on Marylanders experiencing poverty. While the simplest solution, enacted in New York and California, may be to exempt SNAP and WIC participants from the ten-cent fee on paper bags, or to create a provision that would return a portion of collected fees to grocery outlets that provide bags to SNAP and WIC participants without charge, we understand that either of these options may also cause unintended consequences locally. To this end, we believe the bill's Work Group should be required to not only evaluate potential impacts but also to bring back to the legislature a solution to mitigate such impacts.

To be clear, our intent is not to kill this bill; we support the urgency of reducing single-use plastic convenience items that all too frequently pollute our streets and streams. Simply stated, this issue is more complex than meets the eye. Blue Water Baltimore does not possess the expertise to recommend, without doubt, what resolution will meet our waste-reduction goals without harming our neighbors on the economic margins. Blue Water Baltimore supports HB209; we also support a time-bound, structured approach to determining an equitable solution for SNAP and WIC recipients.

Thank you for your consideration.

Jennifer Aiosa
Executive Director