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THE MARYLAND HOUSE OF DELEGATES
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SPONSOR TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF HB277
(ENVIRONMENT - WATER BOTTLE FILLING STATIONS - REQUIREMENT)

Delegate Sheila Ruth
February 5, 2025

HB277 is based on last year's HB841, which passed the House and was on the Senate floor at midnight on Sine Die, although it's not in the same posture as the bill's Senate Sponsor, Senator Ben Brooks, and I did make a couple of minor changes.

Reusable water bottles are an increasingly popular alternative choice to single-use plastic bottles, and frequent users of these buildings love easy access to fresh water. Several states have enacted similar laws, including Illinois (SB1715) and Washington state (Section 2 of HB1085).

This bill requires the installation of a water bottle refill station in all newly constructed buildings (not already under contract) where a water fountain is already required by the international plumbing code. The refill station must accommodate a 10 inch container, and a unit combining a filling station and a water fountain may be used. This is a low-cost, easy option, as the cost of a combination water fountain/filling station is not significantly higher than the cost of a water fountain alone.

This year Senator Brooks and I also added a requirement to install these during renovations, but only where either a water fountain is being replaced or a new water fountain would already be required under the international plumbing code.

Last year's bill also included a section requiring the Maryland Department of the Environment (MDE) to survey state agencies on their water bottle usage. That requirement has been removed from HB277, as MDE performed a survey electively during the interim.

Why is this legislation important?

Plastic waste is clogging our roads, our streams, our solid waste disposal systems, and the Chesapeake Bay. Plastics are not all bad: the invention of plastic has revolutionized some industries, such as medicine. However, our increasing reliance on single-use plastics - such as bottles and grocery bags - for

convenience has led to an explosion in the production of plastic and corresponding waste generated. Plastic production has more than doubled in the last two decades.

This exponential growth of plastic production and waste generated causes many problems:

- Marine animals ingest plastic waste or become entangled in it;
- Our landfills are running out of space;
- Plastic waste litters our communities creating an unsightly mess;
- Many plastics contain toxic chemicals that can leach into the environment and harm wildlife and human health. Some of these chemicals can cause cancer, developmental delays, neurological issues, diabetes, and more.
- Plastics also break down into, or shed, microplastics - small particles that are then ingested by animals where they enter the food web. These microplastics can contain harmful chemicals and/or pathogens; and
- Over 98% of plastics are produced from oil, gas, and coal. Extraction of these fossil fuels and their use in the production of plastic releases greenhouse gasses and contributes to air and water pollution.

But what about recycling?

Increasing the percentage of plastic that is recycled is important, but even that is an inadequate solution. There is an environmental cost to recycling processes, too, and some methods of recycling emit toxic chemicals. A recent study found that recycled plastic actually has more chemicals than virgin plastic. Many of these chemicals find their way into our food, making recycled plastics "vectors for spreading chemicals of concern."

Another recent study found that the recycling process generates a significant amount of microplastics: as much as 6% to 13% of incoming waste

Alternate methods of recycling are being developed but have not yet been proven on a large scale and many also have negative environmental impacts.

How will HB277 help?

Plastics have revolutionized many industries and undeniably serve important uses. However, it's clear that we cannot keep accelerating our consumption of single-use plastics without causing significant negative impacts on the environment and human health. For decades, the goal has been to "reduce, reuse, recycle" - but while recycling is important, we place too much emphasis on it and need to shift our efforts towards reducing unnecessary consumption of plastics in the first place.

The Maryland General Assembly has rightly been working on increasing and improving our recycling of all materials, including plastic bottles, and that important work must continue. However, we must also in parallel reduce the amount of disposable plastics we consume as a longer-term solution. HB277 helps to increase the availability of fresh water, enabling consumers to make smart choices to improve our environment and human health. I ask for a favorable report for HB277.

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Appendix:

Buildings required to install water fountains from the international plumbing code

Assembly & Entertainment

- Theaters and other buildings for the performing arts and motion pictures: 1 per 500 (1 water fountain required for every 500 people of capacity)
- Nightclubs, bars, taverns, dance halls and buildings for similar purpose: 1 per 500
- Restaurants, banquet halls, and food courts: 1 per 500
- Casino gaming areas: 1 per 1000
- Auditoriums without permanent seating, art galleries, exhibition halls, museums, lecture halls, libraries, arcades, and gymnasiums: 1 per 500
- Passenger terminals and transportation facilities: 1 per 1000
- Places of worship and other religious services: 1 per 1000
- Coliseums,arenas, skating rinks, pools, and tennis courts for indoor sporting events: 1 per 1000
- Stadiums, amusement parks, bleachers, and grandstands for outdoor sporting events: 1 per 1000

Business

- Buildings for the transaction of business, professional services, other services involving merchandise, office buildings, banks, ambulatory care, light industrial and similar uses: 1 per 100

Educational

- Educational facilities: 1 per 100

Factory and Industrial

- Structures in which occupants are engaged in work fabricating, assembly or processing of products or materials: 1 per 400
- Institutional
- Custodial care facilities: 1 per 100
- Medical care recipients in hospitals or nursing homes: 1 per 100
- Employees in hospitals and nursing homes: 1 per 100
- Visitors in hospitals and nursing homes: 1 per 500
- Prisons: 1 per 100

- Reformatories, detention centers, and correctional centers: 1 per 100
- Adult day care and child day care: 1 per 100

Mercantile

- Retail stores, service stations, shops, salesrooms, markets and shopping centers: 1 per 1000

Residential

- Dormitories, fraternities, sororities: 1 per 100
- Congregate living facilities with 16 or fewer persons: 1 per 100
- NOT required for hotels, motels, apartments, single family homes

Storage

- Structures for the storage of goods, warehouses: 1 per 1000