



Barbara Noveau, Executive Director, DoTheMostGood—Montgomery County

COMMITTEE: Economic Matters

TESTIMONY ON: HB296 – Environment - Single–Use Plastic Straws – Use in a Food Service Business, with the amendments proposed by Delegate Love.

POSITION: SUPPORT

HEARING DATE: February 19, 2020

BILL CONTACT: Delegate Sara Love

To: The Honorable Dereck E. Davis, Chair, Economic Matters Committee, and Committee Members

DoTheMostGood—Montgomery County (DTMG) is a progressive grassroots organization with more than 1600 members who live in a wide range of communities from Bethesda near the DC line north to Germantown and beyond, and from Potomac east to Silver Spring and Olney. DTMG supports legislation and activities that provide a safe and healthy environment for our members. Therefore, DTMG supports legislation that will reduce plastic pollution. HB296, with the proposed amendments, constitutes a laudable step forward.

Plastic straws and stirrers are offered freely with soft drink purchases at virtually all types of restaurants and dining facilities, and less frequently with water served at restaurants. The easy availability of plastic straws lets people dispose of used straws knowing that obtaining another one is virtually free and within arm's reach. It's been estimated that more than 500 million single-use plastic straws are used and thrown away every day in the US, and that Americans use an average of 1.6 straws per person per day -- that adds up to 175 billion plastic straws per year. That's enough to fill 46,400 school buses, wrap around the earth 2.5 times, or fill Yankee Stadium more than 9 times every year!

Plastic straws and stirrers harm the environment. Most plastic straws and stirrers are manufactured from polypropylene, a hydrocarbon and a fossil fuel byproduct. Production of polypropylene results in emission of toxic pollutants into the environment. Incinerating discarded plastic releases toxic dioxins into the air, which we end up eating when they settle onto our crops and get bioaccumulated into food animals. We have all seen plastic waste littering beaches, sidewalks, and parks, and floating in the water. Plastic straws are in the top 10 litter items found on beaches during International Coastal Cleanup Days. Plastic straws are not biodegradable, which means they can't be naturally broken down in the environment; they photo degrade into smaller and smaller microplastic pieces, which get ingested by marine and land animals and make their way into our food chain. Plastic straws are the 6th most common trash item found during ocean cleanups. Plastic straws that get into the ocean can be mistaken for food by marine animals. When animals ingest plastic, it clogs up their digestive systems, which can choke or kill animals such as birds or sea turtles. Most of us were repulsed by the viral video of researchers off the coast of Costa Rica removing a plastic straw from the nose of a sea turtle.

Although recycling is an effective way of dealing with the environmental pollution caused by many other plastic items, plastic straws and stirrers are light weight and small. Recycling facilities do not accept them because they jam the sorting machinery. Therefore, the most effective way to eliminate plastic straw and stirrer waste is not to use them in the first place – which is the goal of HB296 with the proposed amendments by Delegate Love. HB296, with limited exceptions (such as one needed to accommodate individuals with disabilities), would ban distribution of single use plastic straws and stirrers in food service businesses in Maryland.

Several types of compostable, environmentally friendly alternatives to plastic drinking straws are available, including paper straws, bamboo straws, pasta straws and even straws made of straw. And studies have shown that 50 to 80% of customers don't really need a straw, and choose not to take a straw even when they are offered.

HB296, as amended, is not groundbreaking legislation. Several localities in Maryland already ban plastic straws and stirrers. Garrett Park was the first town in Maryland to ban plastic straws and Rockville has considered it. HB296, with the proposed amendments, is modeled after legislation adopted by Prince George's and Charles Counties. A number of other US states and cities also have already enacted legislation to stem the tide of waste from plastic straws and stirrers. For example, the District of Columbia fines businesses that continue offering plastic straws after July 1, 2019. Other jurisdictions that have banned or have pending legislation to ban plastic straws and stirrers include Hawaii and California, New York City, Seattle and Edmonds in Washington State, Miami Beach and Fort Myers in Florida, Milwaukee, Somerville Massachusetts, and Monmouth Beach New Jersey.

Even food service businesses know that reducing or eliminating use of plastic straws and stirrers is what they need to do for a healthy environment. For example, Starbucks has announced that it will get rid of its plastic straws by this year, and McDonalds has phased out plastic straws in their UK restaurants, replacing them with paper straws. The Colorado Restaurant Association implemented an "offer first" policy, and the National Restaurant Association now recognizes an "offer first" policy as an industry best practice. Xanterra Parks and Resorts launched a "Choose to be Straw Free" program at its facilities in at least ten National Parks across the US.

If food service businesses across Maryland replace plastic straws and stirrers with fully compostable straws and stirrers, a big part of the stream of plastic pollution will be eliminated. HB296, with the proposed amendments, will reduce plastic pollution and help Marylanders change our habits in order to create a more sustainable environment.

Therefore, DoTheMostGood strongly recommends a **Favorable** report on HB296 with the amendments proposed by Delegate Love.

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