



Maryland Developmental
Disabilities Council



Economic Matters Committee
February 19, 2020

HB 296: Environment-Single-Use Plastic Straws – Use in Food Service Business
Position: **Support IF Amended (Sponsor Amendments)**

The Maryland Developmental Disabilities Council’s (Council) mission is to advance the inclusion of people with developmental disabilities in all facets of community life by eliminating barriers, creating opportunities, empowering people, and promoting innovation. People with developmental disabilities and their families want to participate fully in community activities. Dining out is no exception. As such, **we have partnered with The Arc Maryland and People on the Go of Maryland to support an amendment that would require food service businesses keep single-use plastic straws in stock to accommodate people’s disabilities.**

We understand the intent of the bill is to address the environmental concerns related to plastic drinking straws and appreciate that this bill, as drafted, does not require a complete ban of such straws. However, in order to have the opportunity to meaningfully participate in all facets of community life, including enjoying a meal at a restaurant, many people with developmental disabilities require **plastic** straws. Therefore, we offer the following information about access to plastic drinking straws for individuals with disabilities:

- **Restaurants may not keep plastic straws in stock despite the requirement to provide them upon request.** Similar legislation banning or limiting single-use plastic straws in restaurants have been implemented in cities around the country. For example: Establishments in Seattle, Washington distributed paper straws and biodegradable options for their customers instead of plastic straws. **Paper straws are not acceptable for some people with disabilities.** Paper straws degrade quickly and can become choking hazards when used with warm or hot beverages. They are also easier to bite thru for people with limited jaw control.
- After implementing the law in Seattle, over a dozen Seattle chain restaurants reported that they had no plastic straws available for those in need when asked. (Danovich, T. (2018). Npr.org.)

In order to ensure this did not happen in Washington DC, the zero-waste campaign mandated that establishments keep plastic straws on hand and require fact sheets be distributed to all restaurants that explicitly states; **“Regulated entities must keep a limited stock of plastic straws available to meet the needs and remain compliant with local and federal disability rights laws.”**

With this information, the Council recommends similar language be included if this bill passes. We applaud the Sponsor for offering the following amendment that addresses those concerns.

(A) This section does not apply to:

(3) INSTANCES WHERE IT WOULD INTERFERE WITH ACCOMODATION OF ANY INDIVIDUAL’S PHYSICAL OR MEDICAL NEEDS. EACH FOOD SERVICE BUISINESS SHALL KEEP A LIMITED STOCK OF PLASTIC STRAWS AVAILABLE TO ACCOMMODATE ANY INDIVIDUAL’S PHYSICAL OR MEDICAL NEEDS AND REMAIN COMPLIANT WITH LOCAL, STATE AND FEDERAL DISABILITY RIGHTS LAWS.

The Council, The Arc Maryland, and People on the Go support community life for people with developmental disabilities and their families. **Maryland must ensure that plastic drinking straws are available to Marylanders who need them.** Not doing so can make life even more complicated for people who rely on this tool.

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