



**Committee:** Environment and Transportation  
**Testimony on:** HB314 – Plastic Bag Reduction Act  
**Position:** Support  
**Hearing Date:** January 28, 2021

**Safe Skies Maryland supports the passage of the “Plastic Bag Reduction Act,” which would prohibit stores from handing out a plastic carryout bag at the point of sale.**

**Lightweight plastic bags are everywhere.** They are carried away by the wind, becoming stuck in trees or clogging up storm water drains, causing flooding. They travel our natural waterways from streams to rivers to the bay and then the ocean, breaking into smaller parts, where birds and other wildlife mistake them for food. This is often a fatal mistake.

**The Threat to the Chesapeake Bay.** Plastic bags are known to look like food and be consumed by birds, fish, and other animals. However, there is also an unseen threat as plastic bags break up into microplastics. As the plastic particles become smaller, they pose a very different threat. They not only leach chemicals, but absorb other chemicals as they travel in the waterways.<sup>1</sup> As the pieces of plastic become smaller, they will affect smaller animals. These tiny animals are food for the fish and crabs that the Maryland fishing industry depends on.

**The Threat to Maryland Agriculture.** Plastic bags are often carried by wind across fields and become entangled in farming equipment, costing farmers valuable time from their workday, and potentially repair costs. Even more problematic than the visible threat of plastic bags, is the lesser known threat to overall soil health posed by microplastics. Plastic bags contribute to this problem. The amount of microplastics in soil might be well four times higher than that of the ocean.<sup>2</sup> When these micro plastics slowly degrade in the soil, they release chemicals that ultimately affect soil health. Good soil health is critical to agriculture as it affects water absorption and crop yield.

**Nine states have now banned plastic carryout bags.** New Jersey, New York, Delaware, Connecticut, Vermont, Maine, Oregon, Hawaii, and California have done so. In Maryland 2 counties and 4 jurisdictions, including Baltimore City, have bag legislation<sup>3</sup> We don’t need these single-use bags. What we need is a change. This bill would initiate that change in shopper behavior, encouraging shoppers to bring their own reusable bags to the store. This would decrease plastic bag litter across Maryland, improving our rivers, bay, farms, trees, and streets.

We are asking for a favorable report on HB314.

Mark Southerland PhD  
Legislative Director  
Safe Skies Maryland

---

<sup>1</sup>[https://www.chesapeakebay.net/news/blog/small\\_plastics\\_are\\_a\\_big\\_problem#:~:text=Plastic%20in%20the%20environm ent%20is,time%20to%20start%20breaking%20down.](https://www.chesapeakebay.net/news/blog/small_plastics_are_a_big_problem#:~:text=Plastic%20in%20the%20environm ent%20is,time%20to%20start%20breaking%20down.)

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.unenvironment.org/news-and-stories/story/plastic-planet-how-tiny-plastic-particles-are-polluting-our-soil>

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.baglaws.com/legislation/state/maryland/>