



Date: January 28, 2021

Bill: HB 314– Plastic Bag Reduction Act

Position: Support

Contact:

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Dear Chairman Barve and Members of the Committee:

The National Aquarium respectfully requests your support for **House Bill 314 – Plastic Bag Reduction Act**, which will limit the harmful impact plastic bags have on neighborhoods and wildlife across Maryland. The National Aquarium believes that plastic pollution is an issue we can stop in our lifetime. This bill is an important step in making that a reality.

An estimated 15 million metric tons of plastic enters the ocean each year; that is equivalent to at least two dump trucks full of plastic entering the ocean every minute.<sup>1</sup> Once in the environment, plastic debris breaks down into smaller pieces, but they never completely disappear. This plastic debris, including plastic bags, is a hazard for wildlife and habitats, as animals may confuse plastic pieces for food. Over half of all marine mammal species have been impacted by plastic pollution and it is estimated more than 90% of seabirds will ingest plastic by 2050.

If current practices continue, plastic input into the ocean is expected to double by 2025. A recent report by Oceana compiled data from 51 organizations, including the National Aquarium, and found nearly 1,800 cases of documented plastic consumption or entanglement in sea turtles and marine mammals, mostly from 2009 to 2018.<sup>2</sup> Of these cases, 90% of them involved animals swallowing plastic. Ingested plastic can obstruct an animal’s digestion or lacerate intestines, interfering with their ability to survive.

On average, the lifespan of a plastic bag is 12 minutes. The flimsiness that makes plastic bags cheap and plentiful also makes them virtually unrecyclable. When that bag is discarded, it will almost certainly not be recycled. It will go into a landfill, be incinerated or end up in the environment. Plastic bags are easily blown by the wind and end up in trees, rivers, the Chesapeake Bay, and eventually our one, interconnected ocean.

There is ample evidence from around the world that eliminating plastic bags from checkout aisles is an effective way to dramatically reduce the harmful impacts of bags on our environment. If this bill passes, Maryland will join a growing number of states and communities across the country to recognize this is a serious problem with an easily recognizable solution.

As part of the National Aquarium’s mission *to inspire conservation of the world’s aquatic treasures*, we take seriously our responsibility to educate our visitors and the surrounding community about the negative impact plastic pollution has on the health of people, wildlife and ecosystems. HB 314 is a critical step in the right direction because it will eliminate one of the most prevalent and harmful forms of plastic pollution. **We urge the Committee to vote in favor of House Bill 314.**

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<sup>1</sup> Forrest A, Giacobazzi L, Dunlop S, et al. (2019). Eliminating Plastic Pollution: How a Voluntary Contribution From Industry Will Drive the Circular Plastics Economy. *Frontiers in Marine Science*, 6:627.

<sup>2</sup> Warner K, Linske E, Mustain P, et al. (November 2020). Choked, Strangled, Drowned: The Plastics Crisis Unfolding In Our Oceans. Zenodo. <http://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.4281302>