

HB 314: Plastic Bag Reduction Act
Committee: Environment & Transportation
Position: SUPPORT
January 28, 2021

The Maryland Public Health Association appreciates the opportunity to submit this letter of support for Delegate Lierman's HB 314 to prohibit the distribution of plastic carryout bags, thereby significantly reducing the overall proliferation of single-use plastics. The thin plastic used in single-use plastic bags takes between 400 and 1,000 years to completely break down. As these plastics degrade over time, they release toxic additives into the environment. These additives may include flame retardants, antimicrobials, and plasticizers, which have been linked with severe adverse health outcomes such as cancers, birth defects, impaired immunity, endocrine disruption, developmental and reproductive effects.¹ Additionally, the image of plastic bags as litter causes detrimental psychological effects.²

Plastic bags are not "free." Their cost is passed onto consumers by businesses through higher costs on other products or services. They litter our communities and waterways where governmental and volunteer organizations remove thousands of them annually.

When in a landfill or the environment, the toxics from bags can leach out and cause harm to fragile ecosystems. Marine animals have been known to confuse plastic bags for food which can lead to blocked digestive tracts and eventual deaths. One in three dead leatherback turtles were found in San Francisco Bay with some form of plastics in their digestive tract; many times, it was a plastic bag.³ Hundreds of other species of birds, fish, and other marine animals have been found with plastic in their systems.⁴ When marine life forms ingest plastics that have degraded, the plastics and associated toxins can travel up the food chain to infect people.⁵

Plastic pollution is a global problem with local solutions. Banning the free distribution of bags is widely considered an appropriate and practical legislative action that can protect our environment and save financial resources. Thank you for your consideration.

MdPHA is a nonprofit, statewide organization of public health professionals dedicated to improving the lives of all Marylanders through education efforts and advocacy of public policies consistent with our vision of healthy Marylanders living in healthy communities. MdPHA is the state affiliate of the American Public Health Association, a nearly 150-year-old professional organization dedicated to improving population health and reducing the health disparities that plague our nation.

¹ Rustagi, N., Pradhan, S. K., & Singh, R. (2011). Public health impact of plastics: An overview. *Indian Journal of Occupational and Environmental Medicine*, 15(3), 100–103. doi:10.4103/0019-5278.93198

² Wyles, K. J., Pahl, S., Thomas, K., & Thompson, R. C. (2015). Factors that can undermine the psychological benefits of coastal environments: Exploring the effect of tidal state, presence, and type of litter. *Environment and Behavior*, doi:10.1177/0013916515592177

³ Bean, L. 2013. "Silent Killers: The Danger of Plastic Bags to Marine Life", EcoWatch, August 6 2013. <http://ecowatch.com/2013/the-danger-of-plastic-bags-to-marine-life/>

⁴ Secretariat of the Convention on Biological Diversity. 2012. "Impacts of Marine Debris on Biodiversity: Current Status and Potential Solutions", CBD Technical Series No. 67. <http://www.thegef.org/gef/sites/thegef.org/files/publication/cbd-ts-67-en.pdf>

⁵ Rochman, C. M., Kurobe, T., Flores, I., & Teh, S. J. (2014). Early warning signs of endocrine disruption in adult fish from the ingestion of polyethylene with and without sorbed chemical pollutants from the marine environment. *Science of the Total Environment*, 493, 656–661. doi:<http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.scitotenv.2014.06.051>