



Plastic Free QAC

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TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF HB 314 Plastic Bag Reduction Act January 28, 2021 ENT Committee

Hon. Kumar P. Barve, Chair, Environment & Transportation Committee
House Office Building
Annapolis, MD 21401

Dear Chairman Barve and Committee Members:

My name is Bente Cooney, founder of Plastic Free QAC, a nonprofit organization founded in 2018 around the issue of litter on the streets and waterways of our beautiful Queen Anne's County and a realization that our world is drowning in single-use plastic. Our mission is to engage, inform and inspire Queen Anne's County residents and businesses to make more environmentally responsible choices.

With a strong sense that something has to be done and that everyone has a responsibility to do their part to preserve the health and wellbeing of our shared environment, we have gathered some powerful data. This data supports our goal of getting rid of single-use plastic shopping bags.

First, in 2019, as a result of our road clean ups, our volunteers picked up close to 1,000 plastic bags, 637 of those alone by Claude Lowery's farm across from Safeway in Chester! "We try to make our farm look neat and attractive," Mr. Lowery said recently, "but all those bags make it difficult." He supports the effort to get rid of disposable plastic bags, as do more than 90 other retailers in Queen Anne's County. These retailers include not only farmers, but marinas, hotels, schools, shops, and restaurants.

Second, we have audited the four grocery stores in QAC and counted every shopper leaving each of the stores for one hour on two occasions. Out of 1,271 shoppers, only 8% used reusable shopping bags. Virtually all of the single-use, disposable bags were plastic. For comparison, we surveyed the Aldi grocery store in Easton, where no plastic bags are available. **People brought their own reusable bags (61.5%) or carried their groceries loose in their carts without any bags (32.7%).*** Only 5.8% used disposable bags. **This data shows that behavior change is possible.**

Only 5% of plastic bags are recycled. Legislators across the country are beginning to recognize the issue of single-use plastic. **Already, eight states and 500 localities in the US have enacted bag ban laws.** Delaware just implemented their ban here in January. If Delaware can do it, so can Maryland! While retailers have had a rough time during COVID, the grocery and liquor stores are doing just fine. It is important to remember that HB 314 would not go into effect until July 1, 2022 when COVID should no longer be an issue and the economy, hopefully, will be on an upswing again. **Another important point is that retailers are free to charge whatever amount they want for paper bags for the people who forgot to bring their reusable bag.**

Just as a point of reference, Charleston, SC, which eliminated plastic bags last year, reported that volunteers found an average of 178 single-use plastic bags during a litter clean-up. After the ordinance went into effect, that number went down to 23, **a 77% reduction!**

We urge you to report HB 314 favorably out of Committee.

Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony today.

Sincerely,

Bente Cooney

Founder

Queen Anne's County 2020 Shopper Survey

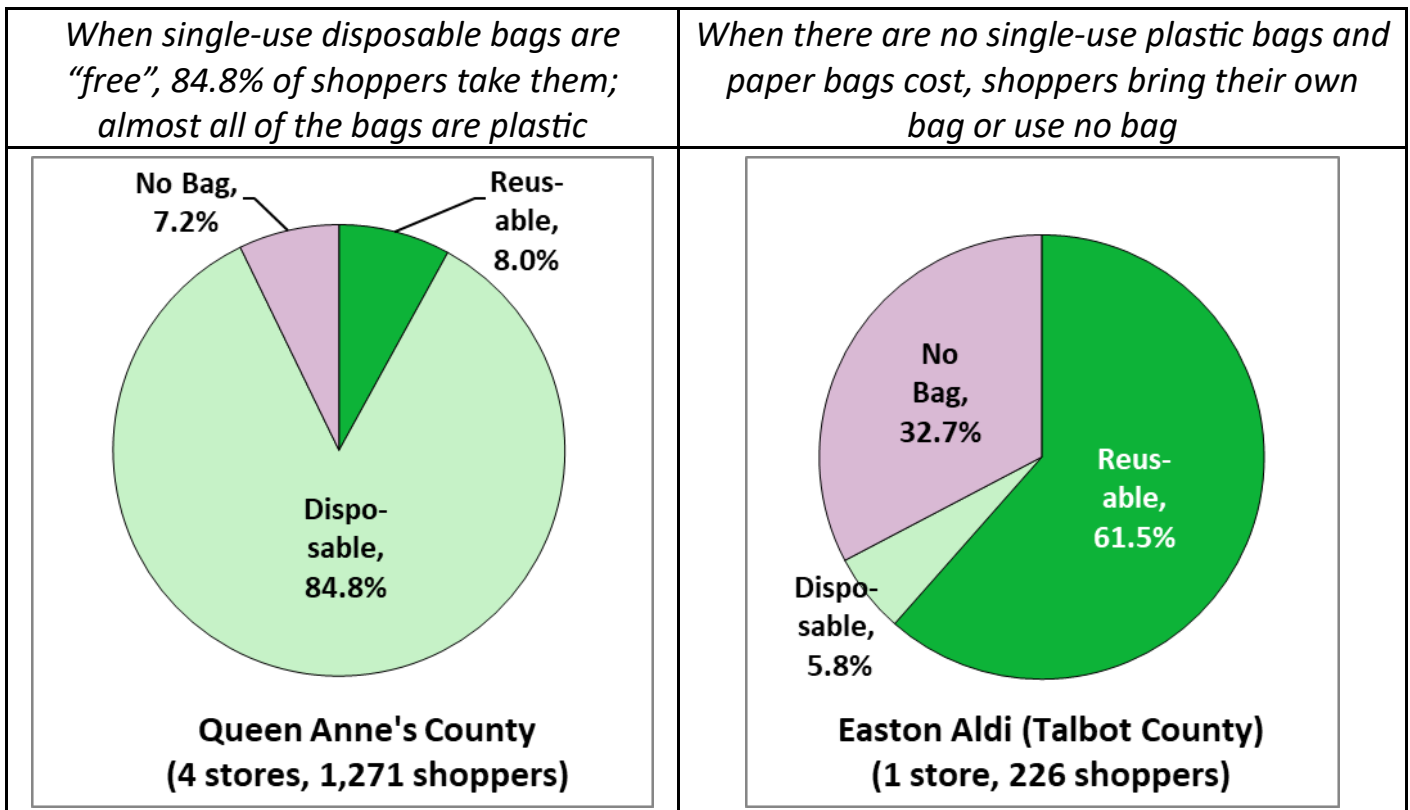
*Plastic-Free QAC & Maryland Sierra Club
January 11-19, 2020*

5 grocery stores, **1,497** shoppers, **12** volunteers

Stores	# stores	# shoppers	Reusable	Disposable	No Bag
Acme, Food Lion, Safeway*	4	1,271	8.0%	84.8%	7.2%
Aldi **	1	226	61.5%	5.8%	32.7%

These stores provide free carryout bags to shoppers. **Nearest Aldi store, in Easton (Talbot County). Aldi does not provide any thin plastic bags, charges 7 cents for a paper bag, and more for various reusable bags.

Virtually all (99.5%) of the shoppers with single-use, disposable bags at the four QAC grocery stores had *plastic* bags.



"FREE" CARRYOUT BAGS

BAGS AT COST, NO THIN PLASTIC