



Bill: SB 223

Date: January 25, 2021

Position: Support

Plastic Bag Reduction Act

SB 223

Support

Dear Chair Kelley and Members of the Finance Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to testify on behalf of SB 223, the Plastic Bag Reduction Act. Oceana is the largest international advocacy organization dedicated solely to ocean conservation. With our 17,800 supporters across Maryland, we are working to advance science-based policies at the federal, state, and local level that will restore the ocean's abundance and biodiversity. We submit this testimony to share our strong support for SB 223 and to urge you to pass this important legislation.

Plastic Pollution and Plastic Bags Are a Growing Problem for Ocean Health

Plastic pollution is a growing threat to the world's oceans, as well as our economy, food, health, and climate. Each year, an estimated 33 billion pounds of plastic enters the marine environment. This is roughly equivalent to two garbage trucks full of plastic being dumped into the oceans every minute.¹

¹ 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.

Plastic pollution is everywhere. Scientists have found plastic floating on the surface of the ocean, washing up on the world's most remote coastlines, melting in Arctic sea ice, raining onto the Rocky Mountains, and even sitting at the deepest part of the ocean floor.^{2,3,4,5}

Nearly 40% of all plastic produced is for packaging, including plastic bags. Most of this packaging is used only once, but the material it's made of was created to last for centuries.⁶

Plastic is harming our native wildlife and contaminating our waterways.⁷ Home to over 3,600 plant and animal species, the Chesapeake Bay is the largest estuary in the country and is an important part of the state's identity and economy. But it's being impacted by our dependence on single-use plastics - according to a 2014 study, microplastics were found in 59 out of 60 water samples from the Chesapeake Bay and its tributaries.⁸ And according to National Public Radio, WBUR, Mr. Trash Wheel in Baltimore's Inner Harbor has collected 627,000 plastic bags as of April 2019.⁹

A piece of plastic can look like food to a fish, turtle, marine mammal, or bird. In a report published in 2020, Oceana found evidence of nearly 1,800 marine mammal and sea turtles from 40 different species swallowing or becoming entangled in plastic in U.S. waters since 2009. Of those animals, a staggering 88% were from species listed as endangered or threatened with extinction under the Endangered Species Act. According to this report, plastic bags are one of the most common, identifiable forms of plastic impacting wildlife. In fact, plastic bags were found entangling and being consumed by animals in 80 cases, some of which were species that frequent Maryland's waters. Cases of plastic ingestion from the region include a 2016 Maryland animal-rescue operation that discovered plastic inside a dead loggerhead sea turtle. Just last year in Virginia, a dead minke whale was found with a plastic bag in its stomach. While we can't be sure if the bag caused this whale to die, we know for certain that marine animals are ingesting plastic, and that a single piece of it can be fatal.¹⁰

² Lavers JL and Bond JL (2017) Exceptional and rapid accumulation of anthropogenic debris on one of the world's most remote and pristine islands. *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* 114: 6052-6055. doi: 10.1073/pnas.1619818114

³ Chiba S, Saito H, Fletcher R, *et al.* (2018) Human footprint in the abyss: 30 year records of deep-sea plastic debris. *Marine Policy* 96: 204-212. doi: 10.1016/j.marpol.2018.03.022

⁴ Peeken I, Primpke S, Beyer B, *et al.* (2018) Arctic sea ice is an important temporal sink and means of transport for microplastic. *Nature Communications* 9 doi: 10.1038/s41467-018-03825-5

⁵ Wetherbee G, Baldwin A and Ranville J (2019) It is raining plastic: Open-File Report 2019-1048. *United States Geological Survey*. doi: 10.3133/ofr20191048

⁶ Geyer R, Jambeck JR and Law KL (2017) Production, use, and fate of all plastics ever made. *Science Advances* 3. doi: 10.1126/sciadv.1700782

⁷ Soper S (2019) Assateague Horse Incident Highlights Balloon Dangers. The Dispatch. Available: <https://mdcoastdispatch.com/2019/05/29/assateague-horse-incident-highlights-balloon-dangers/>. Accessed Feb 19, 2020.

⁸ Yonkos LT, Friedel EA, Perez-Reyes AC, Ghosal S and Arthur CD (2014) Microplastic in four estuarine rivers in the Chesapeake Bay, U.S.A. *Environmental Science & Technology* 48: 14195-14202. doi: 10.1021/es5036317

⁹ Peter O'Dowd. (2019, April 16). Meet Mr. Trash Wheel: Baltimore Harbor's Googly Eyed Garbage Gobbler. In Here and Now. National Public Radio. <https://www.wbur.org/hereandnow/2019/04/16/mr-trash-wheel-baltimore>

¹⁰ Warner K, Linske E, Mustain P, Valliant M, Leavitt C. November 2020. "Choked, Strangled, Drowned: The Plastics Crisis Unfolding in Our Oceans." Oceana. Washington, D.C.

Plastic Pollution Threatens Maryland's Coastal Tourism Industry

Global production of plastic is now projected to increase at least fourfold between 2014 and 2050.¹¹ As plastic production increases, so will the amount of plastic that enters the ocean. This poses a direct threat to coastal tourism and other local businesses that depend on a healthy and clean marine environment. In Maryland, a healthy Chesapeake Bay and Atlantic Ocean support over 96,000 jobs and \$6 billion in GDP.¹²

Healthy ocean resources define the way of life for communities across Maryland. The Eastern Shore is particularly known for incredible catches of blue crab and Assateague Island's pristine beaches. Destinations like Ocean City, and the major port cities of Annapolis and Baltimore, attract millions of visitors and generate billions of dollars each year. A healthy bay also fosters productive commercial fishing in the Atlantic, driving the coastal economy with large catches of blue crab, clams, perch, striped bass, sea trout, and flounder. But plastic bags and plastic pollution could threaten these valuable resources.

The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) funded a study that found that marine debris, including plastic pollution, can affect beachgoer behavior, impacting coastal tourism and a state's economy. The study reveals that doubling marine debris on beaches in coastal Delaware and Maryland would result in a decrease of the number visitor days that people spend on beaches by nearly 3.5 million, causing a decrease in tourism spending by \$254 million, and a loss of 3,300 local jobs.¹³

Eliminating plastic bags and moving towards a stronger, zero waste economy represents an opportunity to bring new jobs to Maryland. The Institute for Local Self-Reliance and Zero Waste Associates prepared Baltimore's Fair Development Plan for Zero Waste, a step-by-step guide to transitioning the city away from incineration and toward recycling, composting and reuse. Implementing the plan's recommendations, including banning single-use plastics and expanding composting/recycling, could create 1,800 jobs within two years.¹⁴

Ignoring the risk of plastic bag pollution endangers the future of Maryland's healthy ocean resources and hinders the growth of thriving coastal economies.

¹¹ GRID-Arendal and Maphoto/Riccardo Pravettoni (2016) Marine Litter Vital Graphics: Global plastic production and future trends. GRID-Arendal. Available: http://old.grida.no/graphicslib/detail/global-plastic-production-and-future-trends_b584. Source: (2016) Marine Litter Vital Graphics. United Nations Environment Programme and GRID-Arendal. 57p.

¹² Maryland's Clean Coast Economy. Oceana. 2p. <https://usa.oceana.org/publications/reports/clean-coast-economy>

¹³ Bear Peak Economics, C. R. (2019). *The Effects of Marine Debris on Beach Recreation and Regional Economies in Four Coastal Communities: A Regional Pilot Study*. Boulder, CO: Abt Associates.

¹⁴ Platt, N. (2020, March 14). Report: Baltimore's Fair Development Plan for Zero Waste. Retrieved January 25, 2021, from <https://ilsr.org/report-baltimore-zero-waste/> p. 16

Solution: Reduce Plastic Pollution at the Source

Recycling is not enough to solve the plastic pollution crisis. Waste-management solutions have not adequately dealt with plastic pollution in the past and cannot realistically keep up with the rising rates of plastic production. Only 9% of all the plastic waste ever produced has been recycled.¹⁵ The rest of it has been incinerated, landfilled, or lost in the environment.

Policies governing the production and use of single-use plastic are the most effective way to stem the flow of it into our oceans, bays, and wetlands, and these policies are becoming more common all around the world. While multiple countries have taken national action, the United States has so far failed to implement a nationwide policy that comprehensively addresses the plastics crisis threatening our future.

Thankfully, local communities are acting by passing policies limiting the use of single-use plastic and banning bags. Takoma Park, Chestertown, Westminster, Montgomery County, Howard County and most recently Baltimore City have all passed legislation that either prohibits the sale of plastic bags or charges a fee for them. Communities across Maryland are calling on the Maryland General Assembly to ban plastic bags; we testify today in hopes that you'll join them.

We strongly support SB 223, the Plastic Bag Reduction Act. We believe this bill will reduce the amount of plastic pollution that impacts the Chesapeake Bay, marine life along the Atlantic coast, and local economies. Passing SB 223 would be a critical step in reducing plastic pollution at the source and addressing the pollution concerns of communities across the state.

We thank you for the opportunity to testify and urge you to pass this important legislation to reduce plastic pollution.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Jacob Ross', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Jacob Ross, Mid-Atlantic Campaign Organizer, Oceana
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¹⁵ Geyer R, Jambeck JR and Law KL (2017) Production, use, and fate of all plastics ever made. Science Advances 3: e1700782. doi: 10.1126/sciadv.1700782