



Of the Anacostia River

SB0223 – Plastic Bag Reduction Act

Committee: Finance

Hearing date: January 28, 2021

Lead Sponsor: Senator Augustine

Position: Favorable

Dear Chairwoman Kelley and members of the Finance Committee,

I submit this testimony in support of SB0223 – Plastic Bag Reduction Act-- on behalf of the Neighbors of the Northwest Branch of the Anacostia River. We are a 501(c)(3) nonprofit all-volunteer watershed organization with over 200 members and supporters in Montgomery and Prince Georges counties. We are committed to restoring the health of the 19-mile long Northwest Branch of the Anacostia River so that this urban treasure can be safely enjoyed by wildlife, our families, and generations to come.

Passage of this bill will help address the numerous problems traceable to plastic pollution. The negative impacts of plastic waste on the environment and on human health have been thoroughly established. The EPA recognizes that “[p]lastics pose both physical (e.g., entanglement, gastrointestinal blockage, reef destruction) and chemical threats (e.g., bioaccumulation of the chemical ingredients of plastic or toxic chemicals absorbed by plastics) to wildlife and the marine ecosystem” (<https://www.epa.gov/trash-free-waters/toxicological-threats-plastic>). In the aquatic environments and watersheds that our organization aims to protect, our volunteers always find discarded plastic, whole bags or fragments, and students have identified microplastics in the water using a microscope.

Plastics also play a role in the release of toxic chemicals into waterways. A recent survey of decades of scientific findings found strong evidence that plastics release an endocrine-disrupting chemical into the environment as they break down (<https://biodesign.asu.edu/news/perils-plastics-risks-human-health-and-environment>). This has a direct impact on human hormone functions. In addition to the chemicals plastics release into our environment, they also make it easier for dangerous chemicals from a variety of sources to reach hazardous concentrations. A study in the *Marine Pollution Bulletin* found that microplastics in aquatic environments attract high levels of “persistent organic pollutants” that occur naturally in seawater. By concentrating

these pollutants, microplastics contribute to higher pollutant levels within organisms that consume microplastics. Those high concentrations work their way up the food chain, damaging entire ecosystems and the humans that rely on them (<http://citeseerx.ist.psu.edu/viewdoc/download?doi=10.1.1.460.1971&rep=rep1&type=pdf>). It is important to recognize that these harmful effects of plastic not only degrade the water our organization seeks to protect, but that this degradation affects the people who depend on and use those water sources every day. This problem is urgent and demands bold and assertive action.

Our organization has seen first-hand the impact that single-use plastics, including plastic bags, have on our state's watersheds, streams, and rivers. We are also keenly aware of Maryland's obligation as an integral part of the Chesapeake Bay watershed. We have been encouraged by the reduction in plastic bags we've found following Montgomery County's plastic bag tax, implemented in 2012. However, it is also the case that the bag tax does not go far enough. Some retailers have been lax in enforcement, and a five-cent tax is limited in its ability to change consumer behavior in the long-term if stores continue to provide easy access to single-use plastic bags. As the experience of other towns and states across the country has shown, a ban on these bags would go a long way toward large-scale reduction of the amount of plastic entering our environment.

The state of Maryland is fortunate to have a wealth of watersheds, creeks, streams, lakes, and coastal areas. But these environmental riches must not be taken for granted. Instead, we must recognize our stewardship responsibility, preserve what we have, and rehabilitate what has already been harmed.

The Plastic Bag Reduction Act represents one action we can take to achieve those goals. **The Neighbors of the Northwest Branch strongly urges the committee to issue a favorable report on SB0223.** Thank you for the opportunity to comment.



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