



# BAN SINGLE-USE PLASTIC CARRYOUT BAGS, and INCENTIVIZE BAG REUSE

House Bill 209 – Senate Bill 313

## DID YOU KNOW?

**The world is facing a plastic pollution crisis.** Every year, our oceans take in an estimated 5 million to 13 million tons of plastic from land-based sources.<sup>1</sup> On our present course, there will be more plastic than fish (by weight) in the oceans by 2050.<sup>2</sup>

**Worldwide, shoppers use each year an estimated 1 trillion plastic shopping bags.<sup>3</sup>** These bags are among the top five plastic products collected in beach cleanups in the U.S.<sup>4</sup> At major grocery chains in Maryland that provide carryout bags, 75% to 88% of shoppers use single-use bags, nearly all of them plastic.<sup>5</sup> These bags have about a 15-minute “working life,” but last for centuries or more.

## Plastic bags pollute our waterways and pose a threat to wildlife and human health.

- Littered plastic bags end up in waterways and the oceans, where they degrade into small pieces, absorbing toxic chemicals.
- Whether intact or as microplastic particles, plastic shopping bags are ingested by marine life, injuring and killing fish, seabirds, and marine mammals. On land, plastic bag litter is a lethal threat to livestock and wildlife.
- The potential health effects on humans of plastic particles, their additives, and the toxins they absorb from the environment are of great concern.



**Bag ban and fee laws change shopper behavior and reduce plastic pollution.** Seven states and nearly 500 localities in the U.S. have enacted bag laws.<sup>6</sup> Montgomery County’s 5-cent fee on carryout bags has cut the percentage of shoppers using single-use plastic bags by more than half,<sup>7</sup> with nearly 60% of shoppers opting for reusable bags or no bag at all. In San Jose, CA, a ban on thin plastic bags and a 10-cent fee on paper bags increased shoppers’ reliance on reusable bags from 3% to 46%, and the no-bag share from 13% to 43%.<sup>8</sup> Plastic bags in waterways declined by 76%.

**Maryland must ban single-use plastic bags and promote reusable bags statewide!**

## What This Bill Will Do:

- The “**Plastic and Packaging Reduction Act**” would prohibit retailers from providing plastic carryout bags to customers at point of sale, and require retailers to charge at least 10 cents for a paper or other carryout bag. Retailers would have to track the customers’ bag charges on receipts. A temporary waiver for retailers would be available based on undue hardship or practical difficulties.
- A working group would be established to study and make recommendations on further actions to reduce plastic and single-use container waste in Maryland.

## Why Not Just Recycle Plastic Bags?

Only about 5% of plastic bags are recycled. They are not accepted in curbside recycling programs because they foul the machinery and are too contaminated to be marketed. Even if the recycling rate could be improved, it would not prevent littered plastic bags from entering the environment. The best solution is to reduce our use of single-use plastic bags by banning them statewide and to incentivize use of reusable bags.

## Why Charge for Paper Bags?

A fee is a financial incentive for shoppers to switch to reusable bags. They may avoid it simply by bringing their own bag. The manufacture of paper bags results in millions of trees being cut down each year, and relies on toxic polluting chemicals; after use, bags typically enter our growing waste stream. Some Maryland grocery chains already do not offer free carryout bags; more than 90% of their customers bring a reusable bag or use no bag at all.<sup>9</sup> Their customers benefit from lower food prices, since the stores are not including the cost of “free” carryout bags in their overhead.

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<sup>1</sup> Jambeck, Jenna *et al.* 2015. “Plastic waste inputs from land into the ocean,” *Science* 347, no. 6223: 768-771.

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.weforum.org/press/2016/01/more-plastic-than-fish-in-the-ocean-by-2050-report-offers-blueprint-for-change/>.

<sup>3</sup> Laura Parker. 2018. “Plastic: We made it. We depend on it. We’re drowning in it,” *National Geographic*, June, p. 40.

<sup>4</sup> 5 Gyres Institute *et al.* Undated. “Better Alternatives Now: B.A.N. List 2.0.” Los Angeles, California.

<sup>5</sup> MD Sierra Club Shopper Survey, 2019. Surveyed more than 32,000 shoppers at 209 grocery stores in Frederick, Howard, Montgomery, Prince George’s, and Washington Counties, and Baltimore City.

<sup>6</sup> CA, OR, NY, VT, ME, CT, and DE have statewide bag laws; HI has a de facto statewide law because all counties have adopted ordinances. Source: [www.PlasticBagLaws.org](http://www.PlasticBagLaws.org).

<sup>7</sup> MD Sierra Club Shopper Survey, 2019.

<sup>8</sup> <https://www.sanjoseca.gov/your-government/environment/illegal-dumping-litter/bring-your-own-bag-ordinance>.

<sup>9</sup> MD Sierra Club Shopper Survey, results for Aldi and Lidl stores in Baltimore City, Prince George’s and Washington Counties.