



**LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS®
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100 E Broad St, suite 1310 | Columbus, OH 43215
Phone (614) 469-1505 Fax (614) 469-7918
www.lwvohio.org

LWVO Testimony
HB625 - AUXILIARY CONTAINER REGULATION
Alan R. Rosenfield, ScD, Energy Specialist
House Economic Development, Commerce and Labor Committee
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As is well known, there are serious problems with disposal of plastic waste. These problems have been discussed in detail before the Senate Health, Human Services and Medicaid Committee by the Sierra Club, whose testimony we have endorsed. Our testimony today discusses some economic aspects of disposal of single-use plastic bags. The Appendix focuses on problems in central Ohio.

It has been claimed that fees will drive customers to stores in the next town. There is no hard evidence to support this claim and it seems unlikely. Typically a customer will leave a supermarket with one bag for each \$15 spent on groceries. For a typical week's cost of \$100, she will pay 30-35 cents for the plastic bags, provided the fee is a typical five cents per bag and she came in with no reusable bags. It is difficult to imagine that this small sum will cause customers to change stores. In fact ALDI sells bags at their numerous stores in Ohio and has been steadily growing.

It is disappointing to see how little effort other stores have made to solving the problem that they have created. But the tide is turning. Kroger is eliminating single-use plastic bags. Smaller chains, such as Whole Foods and Trader Joe's have already done so. Charging for plastic bags is widespread in Canada, with excellent results. Bag usage has dropped almost 70% in Ontario and over 50% in Quebec. And the Canadian stores have turned a cost into a profit.

Fee-for-bags is a classic win-win situation. Stores make money at very low cost to the customer. A cleaner environment results and local governments save clean-up money. Overall, Ohio will benefit greatly if these fees are adopted.

I will be happy to answer any questions.

Appendix - Plastic Waste in Central Ohio

Tamara Murray

League of Women Voters of Metropolitan Columbus

Per Article XVIII of the Ohio constitution, "municipalities shall have authority to exercise all powers of local self-government and to adopt and enforce within their limits such local police, sanitary and other similar regulations, as are not in conflict with general laws." (1) This is known as "home rule", which allows local municipalities to deal effectively with issues of solid waste management.

Based on the Mid-Ohio Regional Planning Commission (MORPC) projections, the Central Ohio area will see an **increase of 1 million people** in the seven-county region by 2050. (2) The Franklin County Sanitary Landfill (FCSL) has a limited lifespan of 48 more years. (3) Population growth paired with a continued dependence on single-use plastics will burden local governments with **increasing costs of solid waste management** and will have a detrimental effect on our ability to maintain a clean and healthy environment for our citizens.

Currently, plastic bags and other auxiliary containers increase operation costs for local waste disposal, highway cleanup crews, recycling plants and more.

Recycling can help reduce the number of plastic bags disposed of, but is not a perfect solution. 17.1% of the trash going to landfills via the Solid Waste Authority of Central Ohio (SWACO) is plastic. (4) According to SWACO Executive Director Ty Marsh. "We're literally and figuratively throwing away \$40 million worth of materials." (5) And many common plastic items, such as plastic bags, are not recyclable via curbside service in Central Ohio. Four in 10 surveyed mistakenly believe that plastic grocery bags are accepted in curbside recycling. (5) Currently the only recycling options for plastic bags are via take-back programs in retail stores. (6, 7) Plastic bags actually do more harm than good when residents mistakenly place them in curbside recycling receptacles, and have become the most problematic contaminant for recycling plants. (8)

Many plastic bags wind up as **litter and cleanup costs are steep.** the Ohio Department of Transportation (ODOT) spends \$4 million a year picking up trash. (9) The trash causes problems like clogged drains and makes a bad impression on possible investors. In 2018, KickButt Columbus (an annual spring highway ramp clean up event utilizing volunteers) collected 1,199 bags of trash and

litter, 181 bags of which were recyclables. (10) There are about 22 million pounds of plastic flowing into the Great Lakes every year. (11)

While 90% of respondents surveyed support recycling for altruistic reasons (3), **efforts to incentivize waste reduction and recycling are often ineffective**. Nearly 70 percent of the waste stream that flows to the regional landfill in Franklin County could have been diverted. (12)

In other states, **bans or fees implemented by local governments have acted as an ideal, low-risk testing environment** to gauge the feasibility of a statewide program, allowing states to improve and problem-solve before implementing on a larger scale. At least nine local municipalities in California completed environmental impact reports (EIRs) and implemented a variety of fees and bans over the course of seven years before California issued a state-wide ban. (13) Hawaii banned plastic bags county by county until all four had passed local ordinances. (14) **These initiatives have also spurred market growth for alternatives**. (15, 16)

According to a recent United Nations report, “While no single measure against pollution will be equally effective everywhere, government levies and bans - where properly planned and enforced - have been among the most effective strategies to limit overuse of disposable plastic products.” (17)

Local governments will continue to seek solutions to manage waste and we urge our state to consider aiding in this effort rather than impeding it. We believe that local government is best suited to achieve these ends.

Sources

- (1) [Constitution of the State of Ohio](#) (Current as of 11/2015)
- (2) [1 million more people? Columbus on verge of growth spurt](#) (GateHouse Media, 2018)
- (3) [Comprehensive Annual Financial Report](#) (SWACO, 2017)
- (4) [Stuff: What Ends Up in Franklin County’s Landfill?](#) (Columbus Monthly, March 2018)
- (5) [Survey: Central Ohioans want to recycle but it’s not always convenient and can be confusing](#) (The Columbus Dispatch, February 2018)
- (6) SWACO’s [Bring Me Back programs](#)
- (7) NOVOLEX’s [Bag2Bag programs](#)
- (8) [Cranking Up Recycling in Ohio: New Insights, Proven Resources, Grant Dollars](#) (The Recycling

Partnership)

- (9) [Combating the trashy problem in Central Ohio](#) (ABC6 On Your Side, February 2018)
- (10) [Update from KickButt Columbus](#) (Facebook post, March 2018)
- (11) [The War on Plastic: Grocery chain takes a stab at plastic bags](#) (WEWS-TV Cleveland, August 2018)
- (12) [Diversion - Reduce, Reuse, Recycle](#) (SWACO)
- (13) [A Short History of Plastic Bag Laws in California](#) (PlasticBagLaws.org)
- (14) [Hawaii First State Where Plastic Bags Banned](#) (PewTrusts.org, May 2012)
- (15) [The Last Straw: Moving Past Disposable Plastic Spurs Companies to Innovate](#) (The Washington Post, September 2018)
- (16) [How ban on plastic bags inspired innovators to create eco-friendly alternatives](#) (The East African, August 2018)
- (17) [Single-Use Plastics: A Roadmap for Sustainability](#) (UN Environment, June 2018)