

Columbus Alternative High School
2632 McGuffey Road
Columbus, OH 43211

November 20, 2019

RE: Senate Bill 222

Good afternoon Chairman Wiggam, Vice Chairman Ginter, Ranking Member Kelley, and members of the Committee:

My name is Maizy Pratt, and my name is Isaac Bamba. We are eleventh-grade students at Columbus Alternative High School and are testifying on behalf of concerned Ohio citizens and students alike. We would like to talk about Ohio Senate Bill 222 with you today, which if passed, would prevent individual cities and municipalities from placing a fee or ban on single-use items such as plastic bags and bottles.

Local governments pass policies to support their local businesses and create an economy in which citizens can thrive. Our voices as citizens are silenced and local democracy is threatened when state or national governments seek to prevent local communities from passing their own laws and governing their citizens how they see fit.

This country was designed to have three levels of government: federal, state, and local. But some state legislators are stopping local governments from expressing their authority just because they simply don't agree with local policy. These legislators are even punishing communities and lawmakers who support policies that they disagree with. This punishment instates fear to carry out policy and restricts local government's ability to govern their people how they see fit.

Our generation and future generations will be facing the consequences if we do not seek to solve the problems of extensive pollution today. Kroger, the nation's largest grocery chain, aims to remove plastic bags from their stores by 2025, and other stores such as Lucky's Market and ALDI have already removed plastic bags from their stores. If they can do it, why can't other companies? The answer is corporate interest. When companies like Shell and BP drill for natural gas, a byproduct of this natural gas is used in the making of single-use plastics. Single-use plastic products are sold to companies such as grocery stores and foodservice businesses and are portrayed as 'vital' to customer consumption. Therefore, these companies gain extra profit from the single-use plastics made from this byproduct. These companies would rather keep this profit and stop local governments from exhibiting their right to decide what is best for their people than preserve the environment and local legislation.

The United States has produced over 9 billion tons of plastic since the 1950s, and the average American uses about 500 plastic bags per year. Only about 5% of these bags are recycled. So what happens to all of these bags? They end up lining our roads, natural areas, and filling our oceans.

Here in Ohio, plastic blows onto pastures, blocks local sewer drains, and is thrown into roads, causing sewer backups and standing water in neighborhoods. The Supervisor of Parks and Recreation has noted that 20% of the time spent by the department's employees is spent removing plastic waste that gets stuck in landscaping equipment. Recycling centers must halt the plant entirely if a piece of plastic is caught in machinery, and cannot resume working until the piece is removed. Landfills often only have one employee dedicated to picking up waste that flies off the property. The Ohio Department of Transportation spent \$4 million in litter removal in 2015.

As students, we see some of the many ways that this plastic waste impacts our daily lives in and outside of school. Many of our peers often bring lunch to school in plastic grocery bags and water in single-use bottles, which are thrown away once they have served their purpose and this is very harmful to our environment, more than people realize. When students are done with their single-use plastic, it is not recycled. Often, litter is left all in our school's courtyard and eventually ends up in the trash can. In school we have blue recycle bins in every classroom, however, the recycling bins are mixed in with the trash bins at the end of the day by janitors.

To put things into context, I [Isaac] do not believe that it is a secret that the waste of plastic continues to increase at high rates. On-the-go lifestyles have grown to require easily disposable products, such as soda cans or bottles of water, but the buildup of these products has led to increasing amounts of plastic pollution around the world due to people refusing to properly dispose of them. Plastic production around the world continues to increase, with the plastic industry estimating a 75% growth in the production of polyethylene (one of the most common types of plastic) in the United States by 2022.

My [Maizy's] grandparents live in the Newark area on a small farm with their horses, barn cats, and dogs. When driving to visit, I often see plastic waste on the side of the road and even in pastures. A colleague of ours has heard from farmers across the state that have noted that they have had sheep and cattle die from consuming plastic bags that blow onto their property. Plastic kills one million seabirds, 100,000 turtles, and

400,000 mammals each year. These animals either die from starvation or suffocation by ingestion, or from choking when plastic bags tangle around the animals' necks.

Plastic never biodegrades completely, it photodegrades into small pieces that fish and turtles mistake for food. The Ocean Conservancy estimates that by 2050, there will be more weight in plastic than fish in the ocean. Think about how much a plastic bottle or bag weighs, and how much a fish weighs. Now compare the amount of plastic it would take for the ocean's plastic to weigh more than its fish. Studies show that plastic attracts toxins up to one million more times than the water surrounding it. These toxins, along with plastic bits ingested by fish that luckily did not kill the consumer, enter the food chain and create a large health risk for wildlife and humans alike.

As stated earlier, plastic litter can be seen almost everywhere. Whether it is in the street, clogging sewers, or even urban animals consuming the litter. If we allow communities to prevent the use of single-use plastics, fewer people would use these items, therefore leading to less pollution. Citizens would also be more inclined to use reusable and environmentally friendly products, also leading to less pollution.

If plastic bags stay on land, in landfills or as litter, they will remain on Earth for at least 1000 years. This is not the world in which we want to grow up. This is not the future we want our children to grow up in. We must take action now if we want to preserve a future that we actually want our children to see. Every child deserves to grow up in an environment where they won't fear for their safety.

We must preserve the power of individual municipalities to make decisions and enact policies on what is best for the community. Waste issues are unique to each community, thus requiring unique legislation for each situation. Uniform statewide legislation will not be enough to reduce waste nor empower citizens to take action against this issue.

Ohio is a strict home-rule state, and if passed, Senate Bill 222 would violate this rule. The Ohio Constitution states in Article 10 Section 1 that municipalities and townships have the authority to govern their own people due to home rule. If this bill were to be passed, the uniform statewide legislation would violate municipalities' Constitutional right to home rule.

Statewide legislation in the form of Senate Bill 222 would prohibit local governments from placing legislation that would enact fees in order to control the use and distribution of single-use plastics. Governments of all types and sizes have considered fee-based methods in order to curb the use of these plastics. Both Cuyahoga County and the city

of Bexley have enacted such fees and have seen tremendous results. Cities in other parts of the nation have also placed similar legislation. After placing the fee on plastic bags in 2010, Washington D.C. found a 72% decrease in plastic bag litter picked up at cleanups. That is 72% less plastic bags clogging sewers, sitting in parks, or flying across roads.

So we ask you, Senators and Committee Members alike, to consider what kind of future you want your successors to live in. Which is more free, a future where the government dictates how individuals live their lives, or a future where we are able to decide for ourselves what is best? Thank you for taking the time to listen to our testimony and consider opposing Senate Bill 222.

Respectfully,

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