



Sierra Club Ohio Chapter
P.O. Box 1977
Westerville, OH 43086

December 2, 2019

RE: Senate Bill 222

Thank you, Chairman Manning, Vice Chairman Brenner, Ranking Member Maharath and members of the Committee:

My name is Elissa Yoder Mann, I am the Conservation Manager for the Ohio Chapter Sierra Club, and I represent 120,000 members and supporters in Ohio. Thank you for the opportunity to address you today.

Senate Bill 222 aims to take away the constitutionally-granted authority of local governments to govern and protect their communities as they see fit. Currently four communities in Ohio have passed ordinances with the goal of reducing single-use plastic pollution. If the people in our communities want to protect themselves and the environment from plastic pollution, they should be able to, free from state interference. A strong local democracy is the best, most effective way to enact the policies our communities need and want.

Single-use carryout plastic bags are widely and freely distributed across Ohio, but are not widely and effectively recycled, and litter our lands, waterways, and communities. Here in Ohio, I have heard from farmers who have cattle and sheep die from, in parts, to eating plastic bags that blow onto their property, local storm sewers often become blocked with plastic waste, causing sewer backups and standing water in neighborhoods. During a river cleanup I was informed by the Supervisor of City of Columbus Recreation and Parks that 20% of their employees' time is spent removing plastic waste caught in landscaping equipment. In recycling centers, plastic bags get caught in machine gears, the entire plant has to stop until it is removed. Rumpke Waste & Recycling estimates it loses \$1 million annually in downtime due to clearing out plastic bags from its machines. Landfills often have one employee dedicated to collecting plastic bags and film that fly off their property. The Ohio Department of Transportation spent \$4 million on highway litter removal in 2015. It is difficult for us to imagine all the ways waste impact cities,

and what actions and policies are in place to combat waste. Single-use plastic items are not only a blight in our community but an economic depressor for Ohio.

Local communities pass policies to help their local businesses thrive and create an economy that works for the people who live there. When state legislators prevent local communities from passing laws, they threaten local democracy, silence the voices of the people, and hinder economic growth and development. Ohio communities have raised their voices, currently there are four ordinances in Ohio focused on reducing plastic waste, with many more in the process of doing the same.

Plastic pollution is unequivocally a burden on communities; actions must be taken to reduce contribution to the waste stream. This is especially salient given that, at current rates, Ohio's landfill capacity will be reached within 35.9 years and the market for many recyclables has collapsed, resulting in stockpiling of waste with nowhere to go.

The Ohio EPA Solid Waste Management Council has mandated Ohio must focus its attention on diverting waste. This will only be achieved by ensuring communities and businesses have opportunities to reduce, reuse, and recycle their solid waste, by diverting waste from entering landfills. Solid waste reduction efforts are a service primarily provided by local governments. Cities with successful recycling programs result from a collaboration of many stakeholders including businesses, cities, counties, and townships. To complicate matters more, communities in Ohio are already concerned by new restrictions imposed by China. For the last 25 years China has handled nearly half of the world's recyclable waste leaving many communities in a crisis as they struggle to handle stockpiles of waste previously shipped to China. Meanwhile, Malaysia returns 3,000 tons of waste back to the countries of origin. This has left many communities struggling to deal with recyclable waste piling up, not knowing what to do with waste previously shipped out of the country.

SB 222 would specifically preclude local governments from enacting legislation that would establish fees to control the distribution of and ensuing waste from single-use "auxiliary containers" used to transport food and beverages, such as plastic carryout shopping bags. This is a direct attack on the principle of home rule -- the Ohio Constitution generally authorizes local governments to govern themselves in local matters independent of state law. Local governments will lose the ability to address waste associated with single-use items such as carryout shopping bags, beverage bottles, and foam takeout containers. At least 471 jurisdictions in 22 states, including Washington D.C., have already adopted some form of control over the distribution of single-use carryout bags, and these regulations have been remarkably effective in reducing pollution and waste.

Americans use an average of 500 plastic bags per year per person. Out of these bags, the US EPA estimates 5.2% are currently recycled. Unfortunately the recycling bins placed at the front of grocery stores are not working; people do not recycle their bags. Five cent incentives and wooden nickels that stores offer customers who use reusable bags are not working either. These systems have been in place for many years and have proven to be unsuccessful.

Placing minimal fees on items like carryout bags, for people who chose to use them, have proven to be an effective disincentive that curbs the vast number of bags that are otherwise freely handed out to customers. For example, in Boulder, Colorado, a ten cent bag fee on disposable bags reduced use by 68% in only six months. One year after San Jose, California adopted an ordinance regulating single-use disposable bags, the city reported that storm drains were nearly 90 percent cleaner.

Because of the inherent problems associated with this bill, the Sierra Club Ohio Chapter opposes language in SB 222 which would needlessly and unlawfully restrict the authority and would remove a means for curbing waste generation and litter in our environment and neighborhoods. We urge you to consider the points we have discussed, support democracy and vote no on this bill.

Sincerely,

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