



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

May 19, 2020

RE: House Bill 242

Dear, Chairman Manning, Vice Chairman Brenner, Ranking Member Maharath and members of the Senate Local Government, Public Safety, and Veterans Affairs Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to submit comments, please accept on behalf of the Ohio Chapter Sierra Club, representing 120,000 members and supporters in Ohio.

House Bill 242 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 want and need.

Single-use carryout plastic bags are widely and freely distributed across Ohio, but are not widely and effectively recycled. This results in these plastic bags littering our lands, waterways, and communities. Here in Ohio, local storm sewers often become blocked with plastic waste, causing sewer backups and standing water in neighborhoods. During a river cleanup in 2019, I personally 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. When plastic bags are improperly sent to recycling centers and 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.

Single-use plastic items are not only a blight in our community but also an economic depressor for Ohio. In 2018 the Ohio Department of Transportation removed 396,000 bags, costing Ohio

taxpayers 4.1 million dollars.<sup>1</sup> 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.

Due to lack of state leadership, Cuyahoga County, Ashtabula, Orange Village, and the City of Bexley have taken the lead and passed ordinances focused on reducing plastic waste. Even the Ohio Grocers Association expressed support of a statewide plastic ban or regulation, depending on the bill language, according to President and CEO, Kristin Mullins.<sup>2</sup> Similar regulations, which are remarkably effective in reducing waste, are occurring across the country totalling 400 laws in 22 states, including Washington D.C.<sup>3</sup>

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 35.4 years<sup>4</sup> 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, diverting waste from entering landfills. Solid waste reduction efforts are a service primarily provided by local governments. 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.<sup>5</sup> Meanwhile, Malaysia returned 3,000 tons of waste back to the countries of origin in 2019.<sup>6</sup> 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.

During the last few months these issues have been magnified as more single-use bags and take-out containers have been used as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. Public health and

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<sup>1</sup> "Ohio roads are covered in garbage, spends millions on litter ...." 8 Jul. 2019, <https://www.cincinnati.com/story/news/2019/07/08/ohio-roads-trash-litter-pickup-odot/1548598001/>.

<sup>2</sup> "Plastic Bag Bans | WOSU Radio." 26 Nov. 2019, <https://radio.wosu.org/post/plastic-bag-bans-0>.

<sup>3</sup> "Plastic bag taxes or bans have been passed in 400 ... - Vox." 27 Aug. 2019, <https://www.vox.com/the-highlight/2019/8/20/20806651/plastic-bag-ban-straw-ban-tax>.

<sup>4</sup> "Ohio Solid Waste Disposal - 2018 - Ohio EPA - Ohio.gov." [https://epa.ohio.gov/portals/34/document/guidance/gd\\_1008.pdf](https://epa.ohio.gov/portals/34/document/guidance/gd_1008.pdf).

<sup>5</sup> "Piling Up: How China's Ban on Importing Waste Has Stalled ...." 7 Mar. 2019, <https://e360.yale.edu/features/piling-up-how-chinas-ban-on-importing-waste-has-stalled-global-recycling>.

<sup>6</sup> "Malaysia to send 3,000 tonnes of plastic waste back to ...." 28 May. 2019, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-malaysia-waste/malaysia-to-send-3000-tonnes-of-plastic-waste-back-to-countries-of-origin-idUSKCN1SY0M7>.

maintaining high sanitary standards, which save lives, is a preeminent priority of the Sierra Club. However, The US Food and Drug Administration stated “foodborne exposure to COVID-19 is not known to be a route of transmission”.<sup>7</sup> Our goal is to ensure decisions are based on sound science and not influenced by industries attempting to use our collective fear about COVID-19 to roll back state and local laws reducing plastic pollution.

Because of the inherent problems associated with this bill, the Sierra Club Ohio Chapter opposes HB 242 which would needlessly and unlawfully restrict the authority of local governments and 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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<sup>7</sup> "Food Safety and the Coronavirus Disease ...."  
<https://www.fda.gov/food/food-safety-during-emergencies/food-safety-and-coronavirus-disease-2019-covid-19>.