



May 19, 2020

**Before the Local Government, Public Safety and Veterans Affairs Committee
Opponent Testimony House Bill 242**

County Councilwoman Sunny Simon

County Councilman Dale Miller

Cuyahoga County Department of Sustainability Director Mike Foley

Chairman Manning, Vice Chair Brenner, and Ranking Member Maharath, and members of the Senate Local Government, Public Safety and Veterans Affairs committee. Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony today in opposition to H.B. 242, the bill to prevent charter municipalities and counties from enacting local regulations and fees on plastic containers, most notably single-use plastic bags.

As representatives of the largest county on Ohio's northern coast, we are all too aware of the harm plastic bag pollution causes to our people, waterways, neighborhoods and communities.

Each year over 320 million plastic bags are discarded in Cuyahoga County after being used for only an average of 12 minutes. These bags can take up to 1,000 years to biodegrade, and they are not easily recycled. We have to clean them up from the coast of Lake Erie and the basins of our water treatment plants. They pollute our neighborhoods, consume landfills and clog our sewers.

They threaten the health of our seniors, families and children. Single use plastic bags are manufactured using chemicals known to cause cancer, birth defects and disrupt hormones. They contain PCBs, hydrocarbons, heavy metals and endocrine disruptors.

As they break apart, the microplastics and their dangerous chemical compounds are released into our waterways, air and landfills. They enter our food supply, including Lake Erie's prized walleye and perch. They're carried by rain. They are even too small to be filtered in water treatment facilities, so they are also finding their way into our drinking water.

What was once seen as a convenient cost saver for grocers has become an albatross for all of us. Single use bags are a terrible option for shoppers and retailers. They rip easily and can't carry much. Cashiers routinely package items in two or three bags at a time to prevent ripping and they hold five times less than their paper counterparts.

For anyone who knows the harm these bags cause, it comes as little surprise that at least 127 countries and at least 349 jurisdictions already have regulations on plastic bags. China has banned these bags for over a decade and Ireland has had a bag fee since 2002.

Bag regulations work. In Chicago alone, bag usage dropped by more than 50% in the first month of their program. In our county, the ban is not yet being enforced but one local grocery chain reported a 74% increase in the sale of their reusable bags and a 10% reduction in the single-use plastic and paper bags. With overwhelming support from residents (72%) we anticipate our effort will be as, if not more, successful than other programs that are already well underway.

State and local governments are tasked with the responsibility of protecting their communities, the health of their residents and fostering healthy living areas so all of us can thrive.

We know that COVID-19 is having a huge effect on how local governments work to do this. Cuyahoga County understands the anxieties that people and businesses face in this pandemic. While we think any connection between Coronavirus and reusable bags is minimal, we want to alleviate concerns of residents and retailers as much as possible and will hold off enforcing our bag ban until January 2021.

Cuyahoga County is doing this right. There is a reason the Ohio Constitution gives local governments the right of Home Rule, and this is a perfect application of it. Lake Erie is our back yard. It is the source of our drinking water. Keeping it as pristine and as healthy as possible is our obligation. **As the importance of clean water becomes more and more evident it is one of the reasons we will thrive in the future.**

Unfortunately, H.B. 242 is contrary to all of those objectives. H.B. 242 is a giveaway to the same special interests who create and sell the bags that end up as hazardous pollution throughout our communities.

H.B. 242 is a direct infringement on the Home Rule rights guaranteed by Ohio's Constitution to counties and municipalities across the state.

If H.B. 242 were to be enacted into law the harm it would cause wouldn't stop with the people and communities impacted by hazardous bag pollution. It would show that our state government believes the profits of companies — not even located in Ohio — are more important than the health safety and welfare of the good people that call Ohio home. It would subject the State to a legal battle over constitutionality of the proposed law, and it would stand as a violation of the trust the public places in our elected legislative and executive leaders to protect and serve the people of our great state.

For these reasons and others we respectfully ask members of this committee to oppose House Bill 242. Thank you.