



Reducing Harmful Plastic Pollution in Baltimore County

Introduction

Plastic bags pollute our communities, clog our storm drains and streams, and harm plants and animals. Like other plastic products, plastic bags contribute to greenhouse gas emissions and environmental justice concerns at every stage of production and disposal, worsening the climate crisis, and they cannot be effectively or efficiently recycled.^{1,2} Banning single-use plastic bags is an important upstream solution that protects our environment and helps build toward a zero waste future. Baltimore County can join a growing list of jurisdictions across Maryland, the U.S., and the world in reducing plastic pollution by banning plastic bags.

Key Components of Effective & Equitable Plastic Bag Reduction Policies

Below are four key components of effective and equitable plastic bag legislation drawn from best practices around the world.^{3,4} Each key component is followed by suggested bill language that is based on legislation passed in other jurisdictions. Plastic bag policies can include many provisions; the four components in this document represent a floor, not a ceiling.

Clear Definitions: Effective plastic bag policies must clearly define single use plastic bags and reusable bags to ensure that retailers, customers, and officials understand what is prohibited and what is allowed.

- *Single-Use Plastic Carryout Bag:* A bag made exclusively or primarily of plastic derived from natural gas, petroleum, or a biologically-based source such as corn or other plant sources,⁵ which is provided to a consumer at the point of sale to carry purchases and is not a reusable bag or a paper carryout bag. A single-use plastic carryout bag is not a bag used while shopping to contain fruit, vegetables, nuts, meat, fish, baked goods, or other items prior to checkout or a bag used to contain a newspaper, garments or dry-cleaned clothes, prescription drugs, or bags sold in packages containing multiple plastic bags.⁶
- *Reusable bag:* A bag with stitched handles that is specifically designed and manufactured for reuse and is:

- Not made of plastic film; or
- is made of durable cloth, fiber, hemp product, or other machine washable material.⁷

Ban on Single-Use Plastic Carryout Bags: Effective plastic bag bans are simple, straightforward, and do not have loopholes. They ban all single-use plastic carryout bags regardless of thickness. Suggested language:

- A store or retail food establishment shall not provide a single-use plastic carryout bag to any customer.

Fee on Paper Bags: In addition to banning single-use plastic carryout bags, effective plastic bag laws also incentivize customers to bring their own reusable bags, usually by charging a fee on paper bags. Suggested language:

- A store shall provide customers with paper carryout bag(s) at the point of sale only if customers pay a fee of at least \$0.10 (10 cents) per paper carryout bag.⁵

Paper Bag Fee Exemption for Low-Income Customers: To ensure that plastic bag policies do not have disparate impacts on low-income residents, equitable laws include fee exemptions for customers who use SNAP, WIC, and other food assistance programs.⁸ Suggested language:

- The fees in this section shall be waived for any shopper who uses state or federal supplemental nutrition assistance programs (SNAP), commonly known as food stamps, food coupons or other type of allotment issued under 7 U.S.C. 2011-2036, or with food instruments, food vouchers, other type of certificate issued under 42 U.S.C. 1786 (Special Supplemental Food Program for Women, Infants, and Children), or with Pandemic Electronic Benefit Transfer (P-EBT), for any part of the transaction.^{9, 10}

States and local jurisdictions with fee exemptions include but are not limited to [Anchorage, AK](#); [Andover, MA](#); [California](#); [Chicago, IL](#); [Colorado](#); [Duluth, MN](#); [Edwardsville, IL](#); [Minneapolis, MN](#); [New York](#); [Santa Fe, NM](#); [Oregon](#); [Taos, NM](#); and [Washington](#).

References

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