



michigan league of conservation voters

Date: April 19, 2016

To: Members of the Senate Commerce Committee

From: Charlotte Jameson, Government Affairs Director, Michigan League of Conservation Voters

Re: Testimony in opposition to SB 853

Michigan League of Conservation Voters (LCV) is the non-partisan, political voice for Michigan's land, air, and water. On behalf of our statewide membership, Michigan LCV expresses our opposition to Senate Bill 853. This bill would eliminate the authority of local governments to adopt or enforce ordinances that restrict, ban, or impose a usage fee on plastic bags and other disposable food and merchandise containers. Local ordinances that ban specific types of plastic containers or place a charge on their use are an important tool to both reduce costs associated with disposal and litter clean up and also encourage the transition to reusable bags and containers. **Therefore we urge members of the Senate Commerce Committee to oppose SB 853.**

Single use plastic bags (SUPB) and containers are a popular convenience item because they are lightweight, free, and readily available. The production and use of plastic containers and, in particular, plastic bags has increased dramatically since they were first widely introduced in the 1970s. In fact, more SUPBs were produced in the first decade of the 21st century than the entire 20th century combined.ⁱ However, the increased number of plastic bags and other single use plastic containers in circulation creates environmental and economic challenges that are often shouldered by local governments.

The average person uses 360 single use plastic bags every year. Despite efforts to expand recycling programs, less than 5 percent of single use plastic bags are currently being recycled nationwide.ⁱⁱ Single use plastic bags are not accepted for recycling through curbside recycling systems. According to Mid-Michigan Waste Authority "if [plastic bags] end up at the recycling facility they get tangled in the conveyor systems and cause unnecessary down time."ⁱⁱⁱ Furthermore, the recent drop in the price of oil has disincentivized recycling plastic bags because it is cheaper now to buy newly made plastic bags rather than recycled ones.^{iv} Most plastic bags end up occupying limited space in landfills or are washed into area waterways, where they negatively impact aquatic life.

Plastic bags never biodegrade, instead they breakdown into smaller pieces that persist and accumulate in ecosystems. Recently, studies have documented high concentrations of plastic pollution in the Great Lakes. In 2012, Dr. Sherri Mason of the State University of New York at Fredonia and Marcus Eriksen of the 5 Gyres Institute found more than 460,000 plastic fragments per square kilometer in Lake Erie and, in 2013, as many as 1.1 million per square kilometer in Lake Ontario.^v As the plastic bags and containers breakdown they often release toxic additives, including flame-retardants, antimicrobials and plasticizers, into our waterways. Aquatic species get entangled in plastic or confuse plastic particles for food. An on-going study has demonstrated plastic present within 25 different species of fish in the Great Lakes system.^{vi} Further, plastic particles act as glue for toxins. PCBs, DDT, and other harmful chemicals present in our waterways stick to the plastic and build up over time. Plastic ingested by fish replaces and therefore robs fish of nutritional intake and can lead to direct exposure of fish to harmful, bio-

accumulative toxins.

Plastic bag disposal takes an economic toll on local governments. In Washtenaw County, approximately 25 percent of costs for equipment repairs at recycling facilities are from damage caused by plastic bags jamming equipment.^{vii} Local governments often spend anywhere from \$100,000 to \$3 million annually to clean up plastic bag litter from neighborhoods, streams and rivers, and clogged storm drains^{viii}

Given the environmental and economic concerns and the lack of a statewide or federal solution, many local governments have increasingly turned to bans or user fees as a way to phase out plastic bag use. Case study after case study has demonstrated that local ordinances that implement a plastic bag ban and/or a usage fee are proven and successful policies to reduce plastic bag waste and litter. After enacting a plastic bag fee of 5 cents, Washington, D.C.'s bag usage dropped from about 22 million each month to 3 million the first month the fee was in effect.^{ix} A plastic bag ban in San Jose reduced bag litter "approximately 89 percent in the storm drain system, 60 percent in the creeks and rivers, and 59 percent in city streets and neighborhoods."^x

In addition to lower costs for local municipalities, plastic bag bans and user fees can also spur market growth for alternatives. The California statewide ban included \$2 million in loans to plastic bag manufacturers to shift their operations to reusable bags.^{xi} Since a ban went into effect in Los Angeles County, local officials noted that local reusable bag companies have started to emerge in order to take advantage of the increased demand.^{xii}

Plastic bags and other disposable plastic containers damage our lakes, rivers, and streams and exact economic costs that are often shouldered by local municipalities and taxpayers. By prohibiting local units of government from regulating, banning, or charging a user fee on plastic bags and other disposable containers, **SB 853 would eliminate a successful policy option that reduces the end-of-life management costs associated with plastic bag disposal and protects Michigan's freshwater resources. Michigan LCV urges members of the Senate Commerce Committee to oppose SB 853.**

Sincerely,

Charlotte Jameson
Government Affairs Director
Michigan League of Conservation Voters

ⁱ Equinox Center; Impacts of Plastic Bag Bans, 2013

ⁱⁱ MoveOn, Ban the Plastic Bag Petition, <http://petitions.moveon.org/sign/michigan-ban-the-plastic>

ⁱⁱⁱ Mid-Michigan Waste Authority, Plastic Bag Recycling Info, <http://www.recyclemotion.org/recycle-motion-blog/plastic-bag-recycling-info/>

^{iv} National Public Radio, How The Price Of Oil Caused A Downturn In The Recycling Business, April 3, 2015,

<http://www.npr.org/2015/04/03/397213109/how-the-price-of-oil-caused-a-downturn-in-the-recycling-business>

^v Alliance for the Great Lakes, Testimony before U.S. Committee on Energy and Commerce, Subcommittee on Health, May 1, 2015

^{vi} Alliance for the Great Lakes, Testimony before U.S. Committee on Energy and Commerce, Subcommittee on Health, May 1, 2015

^{vii} Washtenaw County, *Why have a Bag Ban*,
https://www.google.com/url?sa=t&rct=j&q=&esrc=s&source=web&cd=5&ved=0ahUKEwiCk4S6wZvMAhXnrYMKHTiODEoQFgg5MAQ&url=http%3A%2F%2Fwww.ewashtenaw.org%2Fgovernment%2Fdepartments%2Fenvironmental_health%2Frecycling_home_toxics%2Fcarryout-bag-ordinance%2FReusable%2520Bag%2520Ordinance%2520Work%2520Session%2520PresentationFINAL.pdf&usg=AFQjCNHxUMZVhbzZ27wE6v8aYvuW4m4CcQ

^{viii} Equinox Center; *Impacts of Plastic Bag Bans, 2013 and Washtenaw County, Why Have a Ban*

^{ix} *The Washington Post*, 3/30/10

^x San Jose's Transportation and Environment Committee, City of San Jose, 11/21/12

^{xi} The Associated Press, 9/30/14, via ABCNews.com

^{xii} L.A. County Department of Public Works, accessed 10/7/14