



100 E Broad Street, Suite 1300
Columbus, Ohio 43215

(614) 469-1505 • lwvoinfo@lwvohio.org
www.lwvohio.org

LWVO Testimony
SB222 - Prohibit Tax Plastic Bag
Alan R. Rosenfield - Energy Specialist
Peggy Ann Berry - Environment Specialist
Senate Local Government, Public Safety and Veterans Affairs Committee
December 3, 2019

As is well known, Ohio has a serious plastic-waste disposal problem. The Appendix to this testimony provides a perspective from Central Ohio, illustrating the waste of materials and the cost of cleanup. Even though action is needed, SB222 does nothing to solve the problem. If anything, this legislation is counter-productive.

Local government needs the tools to control their waste flow. And they have power to do so, because home rule has been enshrined in the Ohio Constitution by vote of the people. If local government does not have the power over trash, what do they have the power over?

SB222 would ban local government from imposing a fee on plastic bags. The proponents main argument seems to be that rules should be uniform across the state, which directly contravenes home rule provisions of the Ohio Constitution.

The proponents aim to prevent a local-based solution. Having done so, they should be prepared to state what state-based solution they favor to solve the plastic-waste problem. The problem will not go away if the state has no solution - things will only get worse.

I will be happy to answer any questions.

The League of Women Voters of Ohio, a nonpartisan political organization, encourages informed and active participation in government, works to increase understanding of major public policy issues, and influences public policy through education and advocacy.

Appendix - Plastic Waste in Central Ohio

Tamara Murray
League of Women Voters of Metropolitan Columbus

Currently, plastic bags and other auxiliary containers increase operation costs for local waste disposal, highway cleanup crews, recycling plants and more. Based on the Mid-Ohio Regional Planning Commission (MORPC) projections, the Central Ohio area will see an **increase of 1 million people** in the seven-county region by 2050 (1). The Franklin County Sanitary Landfill (FCSL) has a limited lifespan of 48 more years (2). Population growth paired with a continued dependence on single-use plastics will burden local governments with **increasing costs of solid waste management** and will have a detrimental effect on our ability to maintain a clean and healthy environment for our citizens.

Recycling can help reduce the number of plastic bags disposed of, but is not a perfect solution. 17.1% of the trash going to landfills via the Solid Waste Authority of Central Ohio (SWACO) is plastic (3). According to SWACO Executive Director Ty Marsh. "We're literally and figuratively throwing away \$40 million worth of materials" (4). And many common plastic items, such as plastic bags, are not recyclable via curbside service in Central Ohio. Four in 10 surveyed mistakenly believe that plastic grocery bags are accepted in curbside recycling (4). Currently the only recycling options for plastic bags are via take-back programs in retail stores (5,6). Plastic bags actually do more harm than good when residents mistakenly place them in curbside recycling receptacles, and have become the most problematic contaminant for recycling plants (7).

Many plastic bags wind up as **litter and cleanup costs are steep.** the Ohio Department of Transportation (ODOT) spends \$4 million a year picking up trash. (8) The trash causes problems like clogged drains and makes a bad impression on possible investors. In 2018, KickButt Columbus (an annual spring highway ramp clean up event utilizing volunteers) collected 1,199 bags of trash and litter, 181 bags of which were recyclables. (9) There are about 22 million pounds of plastic flowing into the Great Lakes every year. (10)

While 90% of respondents surveyed support recycling for altruistic reasons (2), **efforts to incentivize waste reduction and recycling are often ineffective.** Nearly 70 percent of the waste stream that flows to the regional landfill in Franklin County could have been diverted. (11)

In other states, **bans or fees implemented by local governments have acted as an ideal, low-risk testing environment** to gauge the feasibility of a statewide program, allowing states to improve and problem-solve before implementing on a larger scale. At least nine local municipalities in California completed environmental impact reports (EIRs) and implemented a variety of fees and bans over the course of seven years before California issued a state-wide ban. (12) Hawaii banned plastic bags county by county until all four had passed local ordinances. (13) **These initiatives have also spurred market growth for alternatives.** (14, 15)

According to a recent United Nations report, “While no single measure against pollution will be equally effective everywhere, government levies and bans - where properly planned and enforced - have been among the most effective strategies to limit overuse of disposable plastic products.” (16)

Local governments will continue to seek solutions to manage waste and we urge our state to consider aiding in this effort rather than impeding it. We believe that local government is best suited to achieve these ends.

Sources

- (1) [1 million mre peopleColumbus on Verge of Growth Spurt](#) (Gatehouse Media, 2018)
- (2) [Comprehensive Annual Financial Report](#) (SWACO, 2017)
- (3) [Stuff: What Ends Up in Franklin County’s Landfill?](#) (Columbus Monthly, March 2018)
- (4) [Survey: Central Ohioans want to recycle but it’s not always convenient and can be confusing](#) (The Columbus Dispatch, February 2018)
- (5) SWACO’s [Bring Me Back programs](#)
- (6) NOVOLEX’s [Bag2Bag programs](#)
- (7) [Cranking Up Recycling in Ohio: New Insights, Proven Resources, Grant Dollars](#) (The Recycling Partnership)
- (8) [Combating the trashy problem in Central Ohio](#) (ABC6 On Your Side, February 2018)
- (9) [Update from KickButt Columbus](#) (Facebook post, March 2018)
- (10) [The War on Plastic: Grocery chain takes a stab at plastic bags](#) (WEWS-TV Cleveland, August 2018)
- (11) [Diversion - Reduce, Reuse, Recycle](#) (SWACO)
- (12) [A Short History of Plastic Bag Laws in California](#) (PlasticBagLaws.org)
- (13) [Hawaii First State Where Plastic Bags Banned](#) (PewTrusts.org, May 2012)
- (14) [The Last Straw: Moving Past Disposable Plastic Spurs Companies to Innovate](#) (The Washington Post, September 2018)
- (15) [How ban on plastic bags inspired innovators to create eco-friendly alternatives](#) (The East African, August 2018)
- (16) [Single-Use Plastics: A Roadmap for Sustainability](#) (UN Environment, June 2018)