

**Why are Cities Regulating Bags?**  
Portsmouth, RI Public Workshop  
November 9<sup>th</sup>, 2017

The Equinox Center in 2013 estimated that up to 1.5 trillion plastic bags are used annually worldwide. As more cities, states and countries realize the detriments of plastic waste, plastic bags are highlighted as an easily preventable source of pollution. One of the most common legal mechanisms to address plastic waste is to regulate plastic bag usage at the retail and consumer end user level by banning them and/or requiring that retailers charge their customers for carry out bags. Generally speaking, these regulations have been enacted with the express purpose of decreasing the consumption of single-use or disposable plastic bags and encouraging consumers to use reusable bags in their place. The need for bag regulations continues to be proven, and their effectiveness continues to be demonstrated.

Phasing-out plastic bags prevents and eliminates waste, rather than just managing it after it has been created. At the front end of the life cycle of a plastic bag, this can reduce pollution and other detriments associated with petroleum extraction. And at the back end, it reduces waste management and litter cleanup costs for municipalities.

**Expansion of Bag Regulation.** There is currently no comprehensive and up-to-date list of bag regulations in place either in the U.S. or globally, so it is not possible to provide wholly accurate data as to the number of regulations under consideration or currently implemented.

It is clear, however, that the number of people living with bag regulations in place is growing. In Rhode Island, 2017 has brought about ordinances on the rest of Aquidneck Island. It is also being considered in communities such as Bristol, Warren, South Kingstown and Narragansett. In Massachusetts, there are now regulations in place in 56 different municipalities. At the state level, California and Hawaii have successfully implemented statewide regulations, with numerous other state bills being considered every year.

**Basis for Food Service Packaging Regulation.** Bag regulation is not intended to solve a global problem of plastic pollution such as marine and coastal plastic debris. It is a singular step toward a reimagining of our larger food service packaging standards and trends. This includes consumer awareness of the exponential growth of single use plastic and the impact of that material.

The exponential growth in the use of plastics in our economy, on its own, is insufficient to justify consumer and regulatory efforts to stem the flow of this material into our communities. Research over the past 10-15 years have indicated that merely 8% of all the plastic every produced has been actually recycled. Additionally, it's been found in every environment in the world, ranging from remote areas of Antarctica, every ocean, pristine forests, and almost every street and sidewalk in the world. Its expansive use has directly resulted in it as a pervasive pollutant. Beyond the mere presence of plastic as litter, its sourcing and structure have compounded other known and emerging human health impacts.

**Examples of Additional Regulations in the U.S.** Bag regulations alone are not the answers. After implementing bag regulation, cities in the U.S. have also taken some of the following actions:

- Polystyrene food packaging.
- Take-out packaging fees.
- To-go cups and lids.
- Single-use straws

Please do not hesitate to contact me if there are additional questions.

Sincerely,

