

February 15, 2021

FOSC supports the Plastic Bag Reduction Act **(**[**HB314**](https://click.emails.sierraclub.org/?qs=ef40e5dc4f9dbf6ad1843cbf09e6b2e9b02472e56ada5d0d1eab2b885faae79f64f6e997c85082e9b822793d6975bdb9eaba1756f62d7332)**/**[**SB223**](https://click.emails.sierraclub.org/?qs=ef40e5dc4f9dbf6aaa1bb5530d2bd3dcfd09a4cd1450b33e3218dc72cd53a3d073a0b0eb9ff9e419e6e4bcece9607812f8336a84755dab85)**)**

Friends of Sligo Creek (FOSC) is a nonprofit community organization dedicated to protecting, improving, and appreciating the ecological health of Sligo Creek Park and its surrounding watershed. We support the Plastic Bag Reduction Act.

This legislation would prohibit, as of July 1, 2022, retail establishments from distributing plastic single-use plastic bags to customers at the point of sale. Passage of this legislation would not only significantly reduce trash and pollution in Sligo Creek Park and the Sligo Creek watershed, but would also represent an important and urgently needed step in grappling with the global crisis of plastics pollution – between 5 and 13 million tons of plastic are dumped into our oceans annually, either as debris or as toxic microplastics. Plastic bags are a major contributor to this. It is estimated that 100 billion plastic single-use shopping bags are distributed in the U.S. each year.

Plastic bags are a significant source of trash and pollution worldwide, throughout Maryland, and in our own Sligo Creek watershed. The good news is that limiting the availability of these bags can make a real difference. After Montgomery County enacted a fee on plastic bags in 2012, data from Sligo Creek clean-ups demonstrated a significant drop in the prevalence of such bags. Plastic bags represented 22% of trash picked up in 2011; but in 2013, plastic bags were just 13% of trash picked up along Sligo Creek.

A ban on the distribution of such bags would likely have a much larger, and more beneficial, impact on our creek, and indeed on all of Maryland’s waterways.

Policy options that fall short of banning these bags, such as increased recycling, are unrealistic. Currently, only about 5% of plastic bags are recycled annually. Plastic bags are uniquely unfit for recycling because they are often contaminated and are not compatible with current recycling machinery. Permanently removing these bags from circulation is essential for achieving a real reduction in their impact on their environment.

Finally, it is important to address concerns that emerged in 2020 that reusable bags might be less sanitary and thus more likely to spread COVID-19 than single-use plastic bags. These fears have proven to be unfounded, as scientists have agreed that “[s]ingle-use plastic is not inherently safer than reusables, and causes additional public health concerns once it is discarded.”[[1]](#footnote-1)

Finally, but not insignificantly, eliminating plastic bags, reduces the costs: of bags themselves, of trash collection everywhere, the cost of healing injured wildlife, cost of transport from manufacturer, transport to landfill, cost of landfill, and in limited instances, transport to recyclers who turn bags into decking and other uses, to name only the most obvious of economic costs.

The Plastic Bag Reduction Act will considerably reduce a major source of trash and pollution in Maryland’s environment, including the Sligo Creek watershed. For this reason, the Friends of Sligo Creek supports its passage.

Sincerely

Kit Gage

Director of Advocacy

Friends of Sligo Creek

[advocacy@fosc.org](mailto:advocacy@fosc.org)

[www.friendsofsligocreek.org](http://www.friendsofsligocreek.org)

PO Box 11572

Takoma Park MD 20913

1. See: *Health Expert Statement Addressing Safety of Reusables and COVID-19*. Available at: <https://storage.googleapis.com/planet4-international-stateless/2020/06/26618dd6-health-expert-statement-reusables-safety.pdf>. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)