

The Maine Heritage Policy Center

Testimony to Oppose LD 1532

“An Act To Eliminate Single-use Plastic Carry-out Bags”

Senator Carson, Representative Tucker and distinguished members of the Committee on Environment and Natural Resources, my name is Adam Crepeau and I serve as a policy analyst at The Maine Heritage Policy Center. Thank you for the opportunity to speak in opposition to LD 1532.

It has not been difficult to find bills that would be harmful to businesses or consumers in Maine this session. While the motive behind this bill is certainly laudable, it would be harmful to consumers in the state of Maine. This bill prohibits retailers from using single-use plastic bags, mandates they charge five cents per recycled paper bag used, exempts people that utilize an electronic benefits transfer (EBT) card from paying the fee and creates carve outs for some establishments.

First and foremost, banning single-use plastic bags does not have the effect some might think. While a ban may have an effect on litter and plastic pollution, there is little that it would do for the environment. The Danish Environmental Protection Agency found that a paper bag would need to be reused 43 times for its environmental impact to be less or equal to one use of a disposable plastic bag.¹ Do you believe individuals will reuse a paper bag provided by a retailer 43 times to recover the cost to the environment created by this change?

Further, a mandate on businesses that would hurt consumers is the last thing we need in this state. While five cents per bag does not appear to be a large expense to Mainers, the cost adds up over time. Nickel and diming consumers and mandating prohibitions is the wrong approach to changing consumer behavior, and plastic bag bans are far from widely accepted. According to the National Conference of State Legislatures, only three states have banned plastic bags since 2014.² Maine should not be the next state to do so.

LD 1532 also exempts EBT card users from paying the five cent fee for paper bags. Mainers that earn below the federal poverty level and do not receive government assistance through EBT

¹ <https://www2.mst.dk/Udgiv/publications/2018/02/978-87-93614-73-4.pdf>

² <http://www.ncsl.org/research/environment-and-natural-resources/plastic-bag-legislation.aspx>

cards would be subject to the five cent fee.³ According to The Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, approximately one third of Mainers that utilize SNAP benefits are above 100 percent of the federal poverty level.⁴ If the goal of this provision is to mitigate the harmful effects on low-income Mainers, the 5 cent fee on paper bags in LD 1532 should be scrapped altogether because EBT card usage is not always a clear indicator of poverty.

Lastly, this bill creates carve outs for some businesses such as restaurants, hunger relief organizations, and some smaller retail stores. Why do these businesses get a pass on this bill when they also utilize plastic bags? If the goal of LD 1532 is to eliminate or reduce litter caused by plastic bags, why does this bill include so many carve outs? Government should not be arbitrarily dictating which business can and cannot sell certain products. LD 1532 simply picks winners and losers without achieving its intended goals. Plastic bag litter will continue to exist because this bill includes so many exemptions and the alternatives producers and consumers use will be more harmful to the environment over the long term.

LD 1532 may be well-intentioned, but it would do little for Maine people. The Maine Heritage Policy Center urges the committee to vote “Ought Not to Pass” on LD 1532. Thank you.

³ US Census Bureau, Maine Poverty Status, 2017.

<https://factfinder.census.gov/faces/tableservices/jsf/pages/productview.xhtml?src=CF;>

<https://www.cbpp.org/research/food-assistance/a-closer-look-at-who-benefits-from-snap-state-by-state-fact-sheets#Maine>

⁴<https://www.cbpp.org/research/food-assistance/a-closer-look-at-who-benefits-from-snap-state-by-state-fact-sheets#Maine>