

I am Carol Montgomery from Palmer AK and I am the chair of the Mat-Su Zero Waste Coalition Plastic Bag Committee.

I applaud Rep Josephson, and Drummond for sponsoring HB 264 and the members of this Committee for considering this legislation to reduce the harmful effects of plastic.

I would like to suggest two changes or amendments to this legislation. First would be to ban disposable bags to make this legislation consistent with existing local Ordinances, and second, to apply the 20 cent fee to all carry out bags including the “reusable” ones.

First let me explain why disposable bags should be banned. As HB 264 is now written, consumers will have a choice of paying a 20 cent fee for a flimsy disposable bag or accepting a thicker “reusable” plastic bag which stores will be able to offer for free, as specified in this legislation. Faced with this choice, I think it goes without saying that consumers will make the choice to essentially eliminate the use of disposable thin plastic bags. In other words, why would someone pay 20 cents for a flimsy bag when they can get a nicer one for free? So this legislation will, in effect, eliminate disposable bags less than 2.25 mil thick from the marketplace, acting as a de facto ban. There is a groundswell of local support to get rid of these bags. Hooper Bay, Bethel, Cordova, Wasilla, and Kodiak have all passed legislation banning them. Amending this legislation to ban disposable bags rather than charging a fee for them clarifies the intent, which is to reduce plastic, and makes HB 264 consistent with existing local laws. I believe this will reduce confusion.

However, the fee part of this legislation is critical, and it would be more effective if it were applied to the bags that will be used to replace the disposable ones. As it is written, HB 264 charges for the disposable bags but offers a free pass on the “reusable” plastic bags. A common misconception is that reusable bags get reused. By definition “reusable” bags include plastic bags that are thicker than 2.25 mil, which makes them less flimsy, so that they can be used

multiple times. These slightly thicker bags are the cheapest alternative for retailers to replace the bags that are banned. When these bags are offered for free to customers every time they check out, there is no incentive to reuse the bags, or otherwise reduce the use of plastic. This has been shown to be the case in Chicago, California, and Hawaii. In order to fulfill the original intent of the ban, which was to reduce plastic waste, legislators in those jurisdictions had to go back and add a standardized fee for the “reusable” bags.

Major retailers want a bag fee to accompany any ban on plastic. I have spoken with Drew Sadler, the Director of Global Policy at Walmart and Sara Osborne from the Corporate offices of Carrs/Safeway, among others. While their position is to support whatever bag legislation the community wants, they want to educate those writing legislation that any plastic bag ban include a mandated fee for the “reusable” bags that will be used to replace them for two reasons. First, these bags, being more expensive, will raise costs. Retailers are reluctant to be the store that chooses to charge for “reusable” bags because it puts them at a competitive disadvantage. Second, they have found that consumers treat these bags the same as the disposable ones, adding more plastic to the waste stream.

By banning the flimsy disposable bags and adding a fee for all carryout bags, HB 264 moves the growing number of local bag bans in AK to the next level by closing the loophole that allows retailers to provide heavier bags to consumers at no charge, thus undermining the purpose, which is to reduce the harmful effects of plastic bags on our oceans and our local communities.

Thank you for considering my comments.