

April 4, 2019

Hon. Harriet Drummond, Co-Chair
Hon. Sara Hannan, Co-Chair
Alaska State Capitol
Juneau, AK 99801

RE: Opposition to House Bill 81

Chair Drummond, Chair Hannan, and members of the committee,

My name is Matt Seaholm, and on behalf of the American Progressive Bag Alliance (APBA), an organization that represents our country's plastic retail bag manufacturers and recyclers, I would like to submit this statement for the record.

First, I would like to applaud the authors of House Bill 81 for putting the issues of waste and litter on the forefront of your legislative agenda. I'd also like to extend my thanks for taking the time to consider the views of APBA and its members. Like you, the APBA cares deeply about environmental stewardship and sustainability, which is a primary reason why we are pioneers in the field of plastic film recycling. Our members manufacture and promote the responsible use, reuse, recycling, and disposal of American-made plastic bags and support local sustainability initiatives across the country.

The draw to enact plastic bag bans is connected to the perception that banning bags will lead to a meaningful environmental benefit. But plastic bag bans are too readily, and improperly, labeled "environmental successes" without any supporting data to show tangible overall reductions in marine debris or litter and landfill rates. Yes, you can ban single-use bags and they may go away, but it is critical to understand the environmental impact of alternative products that will fill the market in their absence. Are alternatives actually better for the environment, and will the ban actually make a difference in reducing overall waste?

When you consider the full lifecycle of plastic bags and alternative products – which we always should when discussing environmental impact – plastic retail bags are the best option in terms of sustainability and resource efficiency. Plastic retail bags are 100% recyclable, and over 90% of Americans have access to plastic bag recycling programs through retail take-back programs.

Compared side by side with reusable bags and paper bags, the traditional plastic retail bag has the smallest environmental footprint. A [study](#) done by Québec's government recycling agency, RECYC-

QUÉBEC, found that canvas grocery bags require “between 100 and 2,954 uses for its environmental impact to be equivalent to the environmental impacts of the conventional plastic bag.” Simply put, plastic bags require far fewer resources to produce, they’re domestically manufactured, and the vast majority of Americans regularly reuse them, most often as trash can liners. RECYC-QUÉBEC also found that plastic bags are reused at a rate of up to 77% as small trashcan liners and for other similar uses.

Data from the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency shows that plastic retail bags comprise less than one half of one percent of the nation’s municipal solid waste. Of the bags that end up in the waste stream, surveys suggest most get there because they’re reused as trashcan liners or to dispose of other products. Nationally, scientific litter surveys show plastic retail bags account for less than one to two percent of overall litter. With such a small share of litter and waste derived from bags, a bag ban in Alaska simply isn’t going to drive meaningful improvement in either category — even if bags disappeared entirely.

Legislation such as House Bill 81 provokes unintended costs and consequences, and Alaska’s residents and businesses will be the ones directly affected by regulatory change. For some, the burden would be significant. People shouldn’t have to choose between buying food and other groceries or paying for bags—but that’s often a reality. Standard recyclable plastic bags are low cost, sanitary, highly reused, and the preferred choice for most retailers and consumers. A 2018 report from the Alaska Children’s Trust found that more than a third of Alaska’s children live in poverty. This should be the focus of elected officials – not driving up costs by regulating grocery bags.

We feel strongly that promoting recycling and recycling education in Alaska is a positive course of action that would benefit the whole state. Since 2005, the rate of plastic bag, film, and wrap recycling has grown nearly 80 percent. All the while, high reuse rates for plastic retail bags persist – both of which can be leveraged to support Alaska’s larger sustainability goals. The fact is that plastic retail bags are a sustainable choice for consumers, communities, and businesses in Alaska.

The APBA would like to urge committee members to think outside the typical bag ban box toward better-tested solutions that are more equipped to advance environmental stewardship in Alaska. We’ve been a part of successful solutions all across the country, and we’d like to work together to find something that will meet Alaska’s unique needs.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,



Matt Seaholm

Executive Director, American Progressive Bag Alliance

CC: Hon. Matt Claman
Hon. Jonathan Kreiss-Tomkins
Hon. Steve Thompson
Hon. Sharon Jackson
Hon. Josh Revak