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House Labor and Commerce Committee
Testimony in Support of HB 25, "an Act relating to disposable food service ware"
March 5, 2025

Thank you, Co-Chairs Representative Fields and Representative Hall, and Members of the Committee for holding this hearing today. My name is Pamela Miller and I serve as Executive Director and Senior Scientist with Alaska Community Action on Toxics, a public interest, science-based environmental health and justice research and advocacy organization. We thank Representative Josephson for sponsoring HB 25, legislation that we strongly support because it is an effective measure to protect health and reduce plastic pollution of our lands and waters.

We offer several lines of reasoning and scientific evidence to substantiate our support for this bill.

1) Adverse health effects: The strongest evidence from our perspective is that polystyrene is a hazardous material. It should not be used in food and beverage containers because it is linked with adverse health effects in humans and animals. Polystyrene is a plastic polymer made up of the chemical monomer styrene. Styrene is classified as a human carcinogen. Exposure increases the risk for such cancers as leukemia and lymphoma, as well as genetic damage to the white blood cells or lymphocytes. There is also evidence for increased risk of cancer of the pancreas and esophagus. Studies found that styrene caused lung tumors. Styrene exposure is also associated with damage to the liver and harm to the nervous system such as vision and hearing loss, problems with memory, concentration, balance and slowed reaction time.
2) People are exposed to harmful chemicals through the use of polystyrene food and beverage containers: Styrene and other harmful chemicals can leach out of food and beverage containers into the food or liquids, especially when the food or liquids are hot, acidic, or high in fat. For example, a polystyrene cup used for coffee or tea releases harmful chemicals. Leaching of the chemicals in polystyrene is exacerbated by the heat and acidity of the liquid. These chemicals also concentrate in added milk because of the fat or lipid content which easily absorbs the chemicals and increases ingestion.
3) Plastics such as polystyrene are highly persistent in the environment and do not degrade: Polystyrene is harmful as an environmental pollutant. Once in the environment, polystyrene breaks into small particles known as micro- and nanoplastics. It is

lightweight which makes it susceptible to be transported long distances and into our streams, rivers, and oceans where it can be ingested by fish, seabirds, and marine mammals. In landfills, the polystyrene continues to release toxic styrene and other chemicals and can contaminate drinking water. This is especially problematic in rural Alaska where landfills cannot contain these plastics and they are often burned without any controls on toxic emissions. In freshwater and marine environments, polystyrene microparticles are ingested by marine fish and wildlife because they mistake it for food. These animals can also absorb toxic chemicals from these microplastics and may suffer harmful effects. Fragmented polystyrene cannot be recovered from the environment and will persist for centuries.

4) Polystyrene cannot be recycled: As with most plastics, polystyrene is comprised of styrene and many other chemical additives that make it undesirable as a recycled material. The chemical and plastics industry has attempted to promote chemical recycling as a technology to convert plastics to fuel. This process is highly polluting, inefficient, requires massive energy and use of solvents. These facilities generate toxic emissions and create highly hazardous waste. They are also prone to fires and explosions. The only chemical recycling facility in the United States capable of handling polystyrene closed in April 2024.
5) Safer alternatives are widely available: As of June 2024, eleven states and over 250 cities and counties in the United States have banned or placed restrictions on polystyrene foam. Food establishments have been substituting polystyrene for decades now, largely based on the interest of consumers to have safe, healthy alternatives. McDonald's stopped using polystyrene packaging in 1990. Degradable plant-based fiber food and beverage containers are widely available and affordable, including those made from wood, paper, cardboard, bamboo, bagasse, miscanthus, mushrooms, and seaweed. Green Alaska Solutions is a business that supplies plant-based food and beverage containers to many restaurants and food service providers throughout Alaska, and indicate that these establishments "have made the switch to such packaging for business reasons – they believe in the benefits the products provide and their customers appreciate and in some cases demand them." This reflects consumer demand for safe products and demonstrates the economic viability of these options. The Biodegradable Products Institute is a non-profit, science-driven organization that tests packaging and disposable products to ensure that they are truly compostable, and that they leave no toxic or plastic residues. It is the endorsement that most reliably describes whether a product is plastic-free, of low toxicity, and degradable. Reusable options are best when possible.

We urge your support for this HB 25 because it is an important step toward addressing the plastics crisis that threatens our oceans and waterways, food sources, and health. Please pass the bill out of committee and ensure its passage during this session. Thank you for your consideration.