



## REDUCING SINGLE-USE SHOPPING BAGS

### GOAL FOR 2017 SESSION

Connecticut is on the forefront of a growing international movement to limit single-use plastic and paper bags because of the lasting environmental harm these bags have on wildlife, oceans, and landscapes. A proposal is being considered at the Legislature to address this growing ecological problem by **placing a small fee on single-use bags in order to change the public's behavior, reduce litter, conserve resources, and prevent plastic pollution in local waterways.**

In addition to saving consumers and retailers money by reducing the costs associated with salvaging single-use bags, a fee would also **generate desperately needed funds for our resource-starved parks and other core environmental programs** administered by the Department of Energy and Environmental Protection.

### WHY ARE PLASTIC BAGS A PROBLEM?

Plastic and paper single-use shopping bags have become a staple of shopping in our country, yet they are unnecessary and pose a **threat to our natural resources**. Nationally, the manufacturing of paper bags destroys approximately 14 million trees per year. Also problematic is the manufacturing of plastic bags which annually requires 2.2 billion pounds of fossil fuel and 3.9 billion gallons of fresh water, while producing a billion pounds of solid waste and 2.7 million tons of CO<sub>2</sub>.

In addition to our natural resources, single-use bags cause irrevocable harm to our ecosystem. Studies have shown that **only 5-10% of these plastic bags are properly recycled nationwide**. Most of the **remaining 90-95%** enter the solid waste system and end up **slowly degrading in landfills over hundreds of years, or contribute to toxic emissions at waste-to-energy facilities**. Others get blown around and pollute our waterways, clog gutters and sewers, and get caught in trees therefore **posing a life-threatening risk to avian and marine wildlife**.

Connecticut residents utilize between 800 million and 1 billion single-use bags each year, **the average of which is used for about 12 minutes, but causes damage to the environment for over 1,000 years**. Reducing the consumption of disposable shopping bags will ease the burden on our waste management system, cut down on pollution, and help to protect our waterways and wildlife.

Fortunately, countries and municipalities from **Ireland to England to Washington DC have successfully demonstrated that placing a fee on single-use bags incentivizes the public to**

While saving the cost of bags for retailers, placing a fee on single-use bags incentivizes the public to:

- change their behavior
- reduce litter
- conserve resources, and
- prevent plastic pollution in local waterways.



## REDUCING SINGLE-USE SHOPPING BAGS continued

employ an environmentally friendly and cost effective alternative, reusable bags. For instance, Washington, D.C. implemented a 5-cent charge on single-use bags which led to an 80% decrease of their use in the first year, and an overall decrease in single-use bags of 60% since the law was implemented in 2010.

There is opposition to imposing a fee on single-use bags, often fueled by misconception. Retailers argue that removing plastic shopping bags from stores will harm consumers by adding an additional cost to their bill. However, **disposable bags are not, in fact, provided for free** to customers. Stores currently pass the cost of these plastic bags on to consumers in the price of the goods they sell. Analysis of the marketplace in California estimated that **the average household paid \$17 annually in higher grocery prices to cover the cost of “free” bags.**

In addition to the consumers' and retailers' expenses, **single-use plastic bags cost Connecticut taxpayers millions of dollars every year** for statewide disposal in the solid waste stream. They also burden municipalities which are responsible for cleaning up plastic bags from roadways and storm drains where they cause flooding.

**Reusable shopping bags are more environmentally friendly than single-use bags.** Analysis conducted by California State University Chico found reusable bags made from recycled polyethylene use 50% less energy, result in 40% lower emissions of climate pollution, and use 30% less water to produce than traditional, disposable plastic bags.

Opponents of removing plastic bags suggest that stores and consumers should be left to decide what types of bags to offer and use. Yet, voluntary efforts aimed at simply reducing plastic bag consumption have not yielded the results necessary to prevent disposable bags' impact on the environment and wildlife. Therefore, consumers need to be given an incentive to choose reusable instead of disposable shopping bags. **Ideally, educational programs would be coupled with incentives** so that consumers understand the fees and become more aware of their recycling habits in the rest of their daily activities.

### **WHAT NEEDS TO BE DONE NOW?**

People need to be given an incentive to choose reusable instead of single-use plastic and paper shopping bags. Connecticut, like Washington D.C., should establish a fee for each disposable, bag to decrease consumption, encourage the use of reusable bags, cut down on pollution, save communities money, and create a much-needed funding source for important environmental programs in Connecticut.

*For more information  
please contact:*

#### **Citizens Campaign for the Environment**

Louis W. Burch  
Connecticut Program Director  
203-821-7050  
lburch@citizenscampaign.org