Stop Plastic Bag Pollution in New Jersey
Switch to Reusable Bags!

Over the last few decades, the issue of plastic bag pollution has become a global concern. Plastic bags have become ubiquitous, and are taking a toll on our environment and our economy. According to the EPA, between 500 billion and a trillion plastic bags are consumed worldwide each year, and each of those bags is used for an average of 12 minutes. NJ residents use 4.4 billion plastic bags each year. These bags, which never fully break down, end up in our landfills, parks, beaches, along roadways, parking lots and in our waterways. Disposable bags are harmful, wasteful, and unnecessary. People around the world are now choosing the sustainable alternative; reusable bags.

What Are the Problems With Disposable Bags?

Wasting Natural Resources – Both plastic and paper bags require vast amounts of our natural resources to manufacture and to transport. In the US alone, it takes 12 million barrels of oil and 14 million trees to produce the plastic and paper bags we consume each year. In addition to the resources needed to produce disposable bags, they also need to be shipped around the world, further wasting fossil fuels and increasing greenhouse gas emissions.

Polluting Waterways – Globally, there is now more plastic than plankton in our oceans, and if we do nothing, there will be more plastic in our oceans than fish by 2050. Plastic pollution kills birds, whales, seals and turtles, and negatively impacts 267 species of marine and avian life. Plastic bags that enter our local waterways never fully break down, but rather "break up" into microplastics in our estuaries, rivers, and oceans. These tiny pieces of plastic attract toxins, including pesticides, PCBs, and

flame retardants, which work their way up the food chain to our dinner plates. Microplastics are being found in our tap water, bottled water, fish, shellfish, sea salt, beer, soil, honey, and most recently, in our digestive systems.

Clogging Storm Drains – Disposable bags often end up as unsightly litter in our communities, and when it rains, this litter is swept towards storm drains blocking them and causing infrastructure damage and localized flooding. Clogged storm drains due to plastic bag pollution was found to be the main cause of devastating floods in Bangladesh, when 2/3 of the country was submerged in 1998.

Costing Consumers and Taxpayers – U.S. retailers spend approximately $4 billion annually to purchase disposable bags, which is being passed on to the consumer in the form of higher prices. Municipalities are also spending millions of dollars to clean up and dispose of plastic bags. Plastic bags not sent to landfills are often put in recycling bins, where they clog recycling machines and cost recyclers time and money to remove. Ocean County Recycling Center identified the cost of cleaning screens contaminated by plastic bags in excess of $155,000 and loss of production cost of $1 million annually (2016).

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Recycling Efforts Alone are Not Effective

Only 5-10% of plastic bags are recycled in the US. In New York, which has had a plastic bag recycling law since 2009, recycling rates have not significantly improved. The solution to the plastic bag problem is not recycling, it's reduction.

Bring Your Own Bag (BYOBag) Policies

In the last decade, municipalities and countries have begun passing legislation to ban or place a fee on disposable bags. From Bangladesh to Italy to China, to Rwanda to Hawaii, these laws have proven very effective at reducing disposable bag use while increasing the use of reusable bags. Municipalities have implemented bans and fees on single-use bags to encourage BYOBag behavior.

Bag Fees: Fees are a proven method of reducing single-use bag use.

- **Washington D.C.**'s 5 cent fee on bags not only reduced usage by as much as 60% but part of its revenue goes to help clean up the Anacostia River. A survey done of residents and businesses 3 years after the law was passed shows the majority of people are still bringing their own bag. There is decreased local litter and the legislation enjoys widespread support among residents of different demographics as well as the business community.

- **Suffolk County, NY** implemented a 5 cent fee on plastic and paper bags in January of 2018. Stores are reporting over 80% decreases in both plastic and paper bag use and residents report less litter in parking lots, on streets, and at local beaches.

Bag Bans: Bag bans also significantly reduce single-use bag use, but they have limited success without a fee.

- **Chicago** banned plastic bags but did not place a fee on paper, leading many stores to simply give away slightly thicker "reusable" plastic bags or paper bags for free. After finding their plastic bag ban actually increased waste and did not change public behavior, Chicago chose to switch from a ban to a 7 cent tax on disposable bags. Plastic bag bans tackle the worst part of the problem, but are not effective without a fee on paper.

A Ban/Fee Hybrid is the Most Effective BYOBag Bill: With municipalities in California reporting over 90% reductions in single-use bag use, we need to move forward with this type of bag reduction law in New Jersey. *By getting rid of the polluting plastic bags entirely and incentivizing reusable bags with a small fee, municipalities across the country have seen large-scale consumer behavior change!*

Case Study: California
Ban on Plastic, Small Fee on Paper

- San Jose -Litter was reduced by 89% in storm drains, 60% in creeks and rivers, and 59 % in city streets and neighborhoods.

- Los Angeles - 95% overall decrease in single-use bag use after their legislation, including a 30% decrease in paper bag use. Similar results in San Francisco and San Jose found that consumers did not switch to paper, but switched to reusable bags.

- San Franciso - A study of the financial effects of this law predicted "slight positive impact on the local economy" from their BYOBag law. That same study predicts a $3 million dollar savings for retailers.