

June 20, 2024

The Honorable Ben Allen
Senate Environmental Quality Committee
California State Senate
1021 O Street
Sacramento, CA 95814

Re: AB 2236 (Bauer-Kahan) Solid waste: reusable grocery bags: standards: plastic film prohibition

SUPPORT

Dear Chair Allen,

On behalf of the below city and county officials, we write in strong support AB 2236 (Bauer-Kahan), which ends the use of thicker plastic bags in grocery stores and convenience stores and reduces California's dependency on plastic. In 2014, California passed the nation's first ban on plastic bags. SB 270 (Padilla) required all plastic bags used in grocery, convenience, and retail stores that include grocery, to be reusable. After a decade under SB 270, it has become clear that California has not eliminated plastic grocery bags. The standards for reusable bags have resulted in exempt bags that are still made of thicker plastic, high-density polyethylene, or HDPE.

However, relatively few consumers re-use these exempt plastic bags for shopping. Investigative reports found that even when the bags were returned to the store for recycling, many still found their way to landfills.¹ CalRecycle's statewide residential disposal reports suggest that over 5 billion bags in this category may have been landfilled in 2021, marking a significant reversal from several years of declining disposal. Since 2018, plastic bag waste by weight in California actually increased from 139,00 tons to 231,000 tons, which is the highest level on record.²

AB 2236 would eliminate the existing exemption of plastic film bags and require grocery and certain retail stores to no longer provide these bags to their customers. Further, AB 2236 increases standards for reusable bags to ensure they are not replaced by a new version of an HDPE bag with plastic film material, or a non-plastic bag that can be easily damaged and is not durable. Lastly, AB 2236 increases the recyclability standard of paper bags to be made from 50% post-consumer recycled materials.

Given that cities are preempted by SB 270 from banning thick plastic bags, cities have had to bear the financial and logistical burden of managing this issue, without having the power to address it on a local level. Most -if not all- of California recycling centers do not even accept HDPE bags for recycling. The

¹ Gutman, M., Simon, E., Park, C., Simpson, T., Kofsky, J., Schlosberg, J., Brooksbank, T., Yamashita, S., & Kim, S. R. (2023, May 23). We put dozens of trackers in plastic bags for recycling. Many were trashed. ABC News.

<https://abcnews.go.com/US/put-dozens-trackers-plastic-bags-recycling-trashed/story?id=99509422>

² Sokolow, L., Meiffren-Swango, C., and Engstrom, J. (2024, January). Plastic Bag Bans Work.

<https://pirg.org/california/edfund/resources/plastic-bag-bans-work/>

Los Angeles Times reached out to municipal and city recycling centers across the state and were “unable to find a single one that accepts HDPE bags for recycling.”³

From production to disposal, plastic waste is detrimental to the environment and human health. Plastics are primarily made from fossil fuels, and the extraction and refinement of fossil feedstocks for plastics release an array of toxic substances into the air and water, including known carcinogens and neurotoxins.⁴ Upon disposal, plastic does not biodegrade, and toxic chemicals released from plastics damage soil quality and leeches into groundwater. Plastic bags are one of the most found pollutants in our seas⁵, and marine life ingests microplastics that are detrimental to their health.⁶ Therefore it is necessary to curb California’s plastic production as much as possible to preserve our environment and health.

For these reasons, we support AB 2236 to reduce plastic waste in California by closing the exempt bag loophole at grocery stores and retail grocers to further a sustainable future.

Sincerely,
The below city and county officials

³ Carrol, Tom. (2024, Feb 21). Did California’s plastic bag ban make plastic waste a bigger problem? Los Angeles Times. <https://www.latimes.com/environment/plastic-bag-ban-waste-404-123>

⁴ The Plastics Production Problem. Center for Biological Diversity. (n.d.). <https://www.biologicaldiversity.org/campaigns/plastic-production/index.html>

⁵ Merran, J. (Ed.). (2018, June). Building A Clean Swell: 2018 Report. Ocean Conservancy. <https://oceanconservancy.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/06/FINAL-2018-ICC-REPORT.pdf>

⁶ Understanding plastic pollution and its impact on lives. United Nations. (2023, June 5). [https://www.un.org/africarenewal/magazine/may-2023/understandingplastic-pollution-and-its-impact-lives#:~:text=Unlike%20other%20materials%2C%20plastic%](https://www.un.org/africarenewal/magazine/may-2023/understandingplastic-pollution-and-its-impact-lives#:~:text=Unlike%20other%20materials%2C%20plastic%20)

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