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MASSACHUSETTS CHAPTER

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Ban on the Use of Polystyrene for Food Containers

Formal Title: An Act to Restrict the Use of Polystyrene

Sponsor: Rep. Frank Smizik

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New bill

Background

Polystyrene is a plastic made from styrene, a petrochemical. It can be rigid or foamed (often called Styrofoam™). Polystyrene is one of the most widely used plastics. Uses include protective packaging (such as packing peanuts and CD and DVD cases), food containers (often called "clamshells"), bottles, trays, and tumblers. There are many low-cost non-toxic substitutes for these containers which are non-toxic.

This bill would:

- Ban the use of polystyrene for food containers, such as the common "clamshell" foam polystyrene take out containers.
- Ban the use of foam polystyrene and solid (non-foam) polystyrene for food packaging.
- Ban local packaging of raw foods using polystyrene packaging.

Why is polystyrene dangerous?

- Polystyrene's principal component is styrene. In June 2011, it was placed on a list of likely carcinogens by a department of US Health and Human Services. Studies have confirmed that styrene is toxic to workers who manufacture polystyrene.
- It is created from a number of dangerous chemicals such as **styrene and benzene, a known carcinogen.**
- Studies indicate that polystyrene containers may leach styrene when exposed to hot or oily/greasy foods or those containing beta-carotene (Vitamin B1), which is present in most vegetables. Although polystyrene is a solid at room temperature, it flows when heated above ~100 °C.
- Styrene is dangerous when broken down. Short-term exposure can cause eye and mucous membrane irritation, and gastrointestinal harm. Long-term exposure can cause, headaches, depression, fatigue, weakness, and hearing loss. Some studies have shown that long-term exposure decreases birth rates, increases the risk for leukemia and lymphoma, and has devastating effects on the liver, kidney, and stomach.
- It is very slow to degrade making it an abundant form of litter, particularly along shores and waterways, and especially in its foam form. It doesn't biodegrade but rather crumbles or breaks into fragments. If strewn as trash on land or rivers, it will have an indefinite life, and could break into pieces that choke and clog animal digestive systems.