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MASSACHUSETTS CHAPTER

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Ban Plastic Bags I (allows limited exceptions)

Formal Title: An Act to Regulate the Distribution of Carryout Bags

Sponsored by Rep. Lori Ehrlich

Refile of H1990, with revisions

Background

Plastic bags are so aerodynamic, that even when properly disposed of, they still blow away and become litter. Not only a visible eyesore, they are dangerous to wildlife. They are often mistaken as food by marine mammals and seabirds. The United Nations estimates that plastic bags kill countless millions of animals per year. These animals suffer a painful death as the plastic wraps around their intestines or they choke to death.

Plastic bags do not biodegrade, instead they slowly break down into smaller and smaller bits that can then contaminate soil, waterways, and our oceans. This process can take 300 to 1000 years. As the polyethylene fragments, toxic substances bond to the plastic. These small bits, known as microplastics, displace food supplies and threaten the survival of a broad range of sea life. Microplastics are inert, and once in the oceans, stay there forever. There is no method to remove microplastics,

- This bill would ban non-biodegradable plastic shopping bags in retail stores over 4000 sq ft.
- This bill allows limited types of bioplastic bags which meet strict ASTM testing standards for biodegradability
- Requires that paper bags are made of 80% recycled materials, and marked "recyclable"
- This does not ban plastic bags that are used in the produce area, supplied to protect produce from contamination.

Plastic Bag Facts

- It has been estimated that worldwide 4 billion plastic bags end up as litter each year.
- Single-use plastic bags made up about 9% of the debris found along various U.S. coasts.
- The U.S. uses 100 billion plastic shopping bags each year, which are made from an estimated 12 million barrels of oil and cost retailers an estimated \$4 billion
- Production of 1 pound of plastic for shopping bags produces approximately 6 pounds of global warming CO₂
- Plastic bags are not biodegradable, and although they do degrade through mechanical action and *photodegradation* in the presence of light, these processes are slow taking an estimated 300 to 1000 years to occur. This process results in the bags being converted to smaller bits.
- Sea turtles and whales are especially prone to dying from ingestion of waterborne plastic bags since these objects are mistaken for some of their favorite foods (jellyfish and squid) and block their digestive tracks when swallowed.

*For more information on this proposed legislation, please contact:
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