



Conservation Montgomery

Clean the Stream and Beautify the Bay Act of 2011
Testimony by Conservation Montgomery
Before the Maryland Senate Education Health and Environmental Affairs &
Maryland House Environmental Affairs
Jennifer Chambers
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Good afternoon. I am Jennifer Chambers, a board member of Conservation Montgomery. Conservation Montgomery supports the passing of the *Clean the Stream and Beautify the Bay Act of 2011*. We support this bill because it aligns with our mission to educate and advocate by improving the quality of life for Montgomery County residents while protecting and conserving the county's natural resources. This bill encourages the people of Maryland to change their consumer behavior for the benefit of our local and global environments. Reducing the consumption and litter of plastic bags in Montgomery County and Maryland reduces the ecological impact plastic bags pose to wild things and their habitats, reduces the public health risk of leaching chemicals into soil and water due to degrading plastic bags, and improves the emotional and physical experiences citizens have when recreating outdoors.

Critics of bag bills across the U.S. tout economic reasons this legislation shouldn't be supported. However, cost benefit analysis shows otherwise. Bag legislation reduces the cost on retailers by lowering the expense of single-use bags. In addition, the MD legislation returns one to two cents back to the retailer for the use of a reusable bag. The costs for local and state government to pick-up litter are reduced when bag bills are enacted, in addition to money and volunteer time spent on organized clean-ups. After one year of D.C. enacting a bag bill, the Anacostia Watershed Society reported a 60% decrease in the number of plastic bags that volunteers cleaned-up from last year. Finally, opponents argue bag fees are a hardship on low income populations. States, jurisdictions, and organizations that serve the low income provide free reusable bags and have developed creative programs to encourage behavior change. Bread for the City, a D.C. food pantry, encourages the use of reusable bags by giving an extra pound of fruit or vegetables when their patrons bring them to the pantry. The organization also saved thousands of dollars by not having to purchase single-use bags. Economics drives many political decisions; however, the impact plastic bag litter has on people's pride in communities must be considered a point in passing this legislation.

How many times in a day do you see plastic bags or their remnants snagged in a tree and acting as an urban tumbleweed? One reusable bag replaces the use of 1,000 plastic bags. Maryland has a population of roughly 5.7 million people. Picture in your mind a vision of your town, neighborhood, park or favorite trail with far less plastic bags majestically waving in the wind. What is your emotional reaction? For me, it is one less explanation to a child of how and why a plastic bag was snagged by a tree. This is a teachable moment I use to explain human behavior and how students can take a small step to making a difference. Conservation Montgomery encourages each of you to make a difference for Maryland's environment and our children's future. Let's please move this bill to the Senate floor for a vote. Thank you.