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## **New York's Environmental Groups Overwhelmingly Oppose Albany's Plan to Roll Back Environmental Regulations & Overturn NYC's Plastic Bag Law**

*With President-elect Trump and the GOP Congress threatening to severely weaken climate protections, New York's environmental advocacy organizations overwhelmingly oppose the effort by Albany legislators to overturn NYC's democratically-adopted law to reduce massive and harmful plastic-bag waste.*

New York, NY – New York's environmental organizations are strongly opposed to efforts by Albany legislators to overturn NYC's effective policy for reducing plastic bag waste ([S. 362/A1750](#), sponsored by Senator Simcha Felder and Assembly Member Michael Cusick). As President-elect Trump and GOP Members of Congress threaten to undo critical climate protections nationwide, and strip cities and states of their ability to advance sustainability, New York State legislators who care about the environment must defend the right of localities to advance effective, forward-looking environmental policy.

Every year, New York City residents needlessly throw away over 10 billion single-use plastic bags, a petroleum-product, many of which end up in our neighborhoods, trees, streets and oceans. NYC spends \$12.5 million per year to send them to landfills.

Hundreds of cities and states across the U.S. (and even whole countries around the world) have solved this problem with a simple and effective policy: a small charge on single-use bags to encourage people to bring reusable bags instead. These policies have been proven to reduce the consumption of plastic bags by [60% - 90%](#). Across ages, races, religions, and neighborhoods, the vast majority of people starting bringing reusable bags, and quickly say they don't mind. After this policy was implemented in Washington D.C., [80% of residents](#) said they either liked or didn't mind the charge. After many cities in California adopted bag laws over the past decade, the entire State of California voted by referendum in November to implement a state-wide law (a full ban on plastic bags, with a 10-cent fee on paper bags to encourage reusables).

A majority of the New York City Council (including two-thirds of Council Members of color, and those representing low-income communities) voted to adopt [Intro 209-A](#) this the spring, after an extensive debate. The Council bill was amended to reduce the fee from 10-cents to 5-cents, to exempt SNAP/WIC transactions, to give stores a grace-period before fines are imposed, and to add more outreach (in multiple languages) and time for New Yorkers to prepare for the fee.

After New York City votes to adopt a bag fee, Suffolk County and the City of Long Beach (in Nassau County) did the same. Other cities, counties, and towns around the state are considering similar policies. Nonetheless, the Felder/Cusick legislation would uniquely prohibit New York City ("cities over one million," in a state where there is only one) from implementing this sound, democratically-adopted environmental policy.

At this critical moment for protecting the planet, addressing climate change, and reducing waste -- given the likelihood of highly destructive action in Washington -- New York State legislators who care about the environment should be following the example of California, and adopting effective, ambitious, statewide environmental policies. At a bare minimum, they should not bully New York City out of adopting an effective strategy to reduce plastic waste.

"Cities from San Francisco to Portland (ME) and Seattle to Washington DC are proving that restrictions on single use plastic bags mean cleaner streets, greener parks and less polluted waterways. Doesn't State Senator Felder have anything better to do, on the eve of the new Trump Administration, than to try to upend in Albany a progressive, environmentally sensible statute that was enacted last year, after full and fair debate, by a majority of our locally elected New York City Councilmembers?" **asked Eric A. Goldstein, NYC Environment Director at the Natural Resources Defense Council.**

"The amended version of Senator Felder's bill is even more egregious and arbitrary than the one that died last session. Why should cities of one million or more -- New York City -- not be able to enact a tried and true pro-environment measure when Suffolk County, with its population of more than a million, will keep its nearly identical law in place? A vote for this bill is a grave mistake not only because of the negative consequences for New York's sustainability agenda but also because it sets a dangerous precedent," **said Marcia Bystryn, President of the New York League of Conversation Voters.**

**Peter Iwanowicz, Environmental Advocates of New York**

"Since state legislators have failed to act New York City took the initiative to lower the harm disposable bags put on the environment and the burden placed on the budget. It is ridiculous that state legislators are now doubling down on their failure, by blocking the progress being sought by local leaders. How will they then be able to effectively speak out when Trump's policies work to undermine the progress they have achieved as state lawmakers? Disposable bags harm the environment and are costly for governments to manage. These bags are used for an average of 12 minutes, yet they remain in our landfills, oceans, parks, and beaches for thousands of years."

**Adrienne Esposito, Executive Director for Citizens Campaign for the Environment**

"Plastic bags are an environmental and economic burden on our communities and we have the right to tackle the problem locally. From Los Angeles to Washington DC to the UK, a small fee on single-use bags prompted consumers to switch to reusable bags. These cities saved money, reduced litter, protected coastal waters, and reduced waste. NYC should not be prevented from enjoying these same benefits. CCE is excited to see NYC's BYOBag law go into effect next month and urges state leaders to halt efforts that would undercut this, or any other, plastic pollution prevention law."

**Cecil Corbin-Mark, Deputy Director of WE ACT for Environmental Justice said:**

"For years, the highest concentration of New Yorkers' waste has been placed in facilities located in communities of color and low-income. Waste from New York City is often exported to landfills located in environmental justice communities nationwide. No longer should these communities have to deal with the disproportionate burden of waste, and the exposure to its adverse environmental and health impacts. A reduction in the use of plastic bags is one necessary step in the process of making the communities we fight for everyday cleaner and healthier."

**Peter H. Kostmayer, CEO of Citizens Committee for New York City, said:**

"What does it say about us that we are unwilling to either pay five cents for a plastic bag or bring our own reusable bag when shopping? Does it indicate the level of sacrifice we as Americans are willing to make to save our environment? Countries far poorer than ours have given up plastic bags in the fight against waste and climate change. Is it really too much to ask of ourselves? Are plastic bags something we can do without or at least reduce in the struggle to save our planet for our children and for their children? It's not someone else's decision. It's ours. Do the right thing."

**Jennie Romer, attorney and founder of [plasticbaglaws.org](http://plasticbaglaws.org), said:**

"I've studied carryout bag laws for a decade and I've seen that the most successful carryout bag laws include a fee component, either a fee on all carryout bags or a ban on thin plastic bags and a fee on all

other carryout bags. S362 is aimed squarely and exclusively at blocking NYC's fee by prohibiting the imposition of any tax, fee, or local charge on a carryout bag in a city of one million people or more. At this time of uncertainty regarding federal environmental protections, and with progressive ideals under attack, it's all the more important that our local governments have all effective tools available to protect the environment. We must protect our local progressive victories. NYC's carryout bag law is a particularly symbolic victory and the plastics industry knows it. The 'American Progressive Bag Alliance' - the plastic bag arm of one of the biggest plastics industry groups in the country - has spent hundreds of thousands of dollars of disclosed lobbying funds fighting NYC's bag law. This preemption fight is the final hurdle. Let's show America that local grassroots organizing can sometimes trump corporate lobbyists, let's #StopPreemption. "

**Tom Outerbridge, General Manager, Sims Municipal Recycling said:**

"As the principal processor of residential recyclables New York City, Sims Municipal Recycling supports the City's efforts to reduce the quantity of plastic bags in the waste stream. Plastic bags clog recycling machinery and contaminate other recyclable materials. Furthermore, markets for the plastic bags we separate are limited to non-existent, as its recycling partner, we hope the City will retain the right to implement measures, such as the proposed bag fee, to create a long term sustainable waste management system."

**Melissa Iachan, Senior Staff Attorney at New York Lawyers for Public Interest**

"Allowing this bill to move forward would be contrary to the principles of democracy and home rule. The people of New York City spoke through their representatives on the City Council to pass the BYOBAG law, and for the state to retroactively nullify the law is counter-democratic. NYLPI strongly supports the City law, which will reduce waste going to landfills and help diminish the number of polluting trucks on streets in some of the most environmentally overburdened neighborhoods in the city."

"With a population of over 8 million people, New York City must take progressive policy action with a bag fee to prevent and reduce damage caused by plastic pollution. Single-use plastic bags litter streets and parks, clog sewer systems, and are increasingly polluting our waterways and likely entering our food chain. It's time to make this sustainable change for future generations, clean water, and healthy ecosystems," said **Sandra Meola, Communications and Outreach Associate, NY/NJ Baykeeper.**

"NYC plastic bag litter is an environmental and health problem run amok," said **Debby Lee Cohen, Executive Director and Founder of Cafeteria Culture.** "Research shows that plastics originating from land account for 80% of global marine pollution, they are a toxic ingredient of our seafood chain, and plastic bags are #2 on the list of deadliest marine litter. Our NY State legislators should take responsibility to understand the latest scientific research and protect the health of our marine wildlife, our local waterways and oceans, and our communities for generations to come."

**Rita Pasarell, Board Chair at Neighbors Allied for Good Growth in North Brooklyn said:**

"The New York State bag fee preemption bill is a direct attempt to undercut radically important environmental legislation passed by New York City. The NYC bag law has overwhelming public support, and would reduce the nearly 10 billion plastic bags citywide that clog our recycling machines, block our sewers, and burden our landscape. Neighbors Allied for Good Growth urges all state officials to vote no on the bag fee preemption bill."

**Mark Dunlea, of the Green Education and Legal, Fund said:**

"The streets, parks and waterways of New York City are littered with the debris of the plastic bag industry. The City Council and Mayor after much debate passed legislation to take action to protect taxpayers and the environment by ending the \$12 million in tax dollars wasted annually to landfill plastic bags. New York City elected officials should be able to take steps to benefit local residents without industry forces and their campaign contributions being able to go shopping in the State legislature, seeking to influence out-of-city elected officials to override home rule."

**Lisa DiCaprio, of the Sierra Club Atlantic Chapter, said:**

"State Senator Felder's bill will only protect the plastic bag industry, which has spread misinformation about the recycling potential for plastic bags that cause environmental damage by polluting our waterways and oceans. Cities in New York State should have the right to impose fees on single-use plastic and paper carryout bags, especially since our municipal governments are responsible for the waste generated by these bags. We call on the NYS Senate to take political leadership by placing people and the planet first by voting no on Senate Bill S362."

**Ling Tsou, Co-founder of United for Action, said:**

"The New York State Senate bill S362 is intended to preempt the New York City bill Int 209 by prohibiting local municipalities from imposing fees on carryout bags. This is totally unacceptable. New York City should be able to take initiative and use their authority to reduce waste and pollution, protect our environment, fight climate change and improve quality of life for their citizens. New York State legislature should pass a similar bill modeled on the New York City bill to preserve and protect the environment and benefit everyone living in New York State. We urge our New York State senators to do the right thing and lead by example by rejecting S362."

**Sarah Womer, Director of Community Engagement at Riverkeeper says:**

"New York City's fee on carry-out bags will reduce plastic bag litter in our waterways, including the Hudson and East rivers. It's a positive step toward protecting the health of the water and the life within it. Together we must stand up for the right of local government to protect the local environment. Riverkeeper urges members of the public to call their state representatives in Albany to urge them to reject Senate Bill S362."

**Patrick Diamond, of the Surfrider NYC Rise Above Plastics Campaign, said:**

"Surfrider Foundation, NYC Chapter, is a local organization made up of New York City volunteers dedicated to keeping our city, city beaches, and city waterways clean and accessible to all New Yorkers. Surfrider Foundation, NYC Chapter, opposes Sen. Felder's Bill No. S362. The New York City Council, as well as other municipal governments in New York State, should be free to pass thoughtful and measured legislation to address significant trash and litter problems affecting our local environment and costing New York City taxpayers large sums of money to clean-up every year."

"Carryout bag fees around the world have proven to be a successful tool in dramatically reducing plastic bag litter and pollution both in communities and waterways. A recent study by the World Economic Forum found that there will be more plastic in our oceans than fish by 2050 if we don't change our behavior and dramatically reduce the amount of plastic we manufacture, use and dispose of. Now is the time to *support* cities like New York in their quest to send zero waste to landfill by *reducing* disposable goods, such as plastic bags, and switching to reusable goods, such as washable, durable shopping bags," said **Sarah Currie-Halpern, Chair of the Manhattan Solid Waste Advisory Board**. "Furthermore, New York City and other major cities are making sure low and moderate income residents are *not* impacted by carryout bag fees, either exempting them from the fee or giving them free reusable bags."

**Christopher Chin, Executive Director of The Center for Oceanic Awareness, Research, and Education (COARE), said:**

"Single-use plastic bags may seem convenient in some instances, but any convenience is far outweighed by their impact - which is far-reaching and ubiquitous. You cannot walk a single city block without seeing an errant plastic bag, and, indeed, every square inch of the planet is affected. However, we can do something about it. Local legislation to reduce or eliminate the consumption of single-use bags has proven to be not only effective, but absolutely necessary."

**Joan Wolf, of the Hewitt School, said:**

"As the environmental club faculty advisor for the Hewitt School in NYC, I want to express our strong opposition to this preemption bill. My students have been working for three years with students in other NYC schools to convince the City Council to pass legislation, which they did, only to have the State Senate try to interfere with this process. To quote my students, who spoke at the final hearing for the bill: 'There is a Kenyan proverb that has resonated with us since we have been involved in this process:

“Treat the earth well; it was not given to you by your parents; it was loaned to you by your children.” Our generation has been left with the responsibility to reverse the negative climate impacts from previous generations. The usage of plastic bags has greatly affected air quality, wildlife, ocean life, and is a contributing factor to climate change. The effects of climate change could be devastating. In 200 years, City Hall, where we now stand, could be on its own island due to sea levels rising.”

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