



Of the Anacostia River

Re: Bill 17-20, Carryout Bag Tax Suspension

Position: Oppose

Hearing: 4/14/20, 1:30 p.m.

I present this testimony on behalf of the Neighbors of the Northwest Branch (NNWB), a volunteer organization dedicated to protecting and restoring the Northwest Branch of the Anacostia and interested in healthy aquatic ecosystems wherever waters flow. Our efforts have included multiple spring and fall stream cleanups every year beginning in 2004 and advocacy for reducing unhealthy plastic pollution in our streets and streams—understanding that most of what goes into the street ultimately goes into the streams. In the current coronavirus crisis, our members are still removing litter, just doing it independently and at a safe distance from each other. We are learning more and more that plastic is the scourge of the planet.

We commend county leaders for seeking to protect check-out clerks from contracting the virus. We are all vulnerable, but they more than others because they must handle groceries that have been handled both by potentially infected other store workers and by customers and are necessarily close to customers as they check out. Is the reusable bag the threat? CDC Guidance, based on an increasingly wide body of experience, indicates that the primary method of virus spread is person to person, rather than from touching surfaces.¹ More effective measures to protect checkers would be requiring plexiglass shields such as have already been installed in many grocery stores (e.g., MyOrganicMarket). And of course both checkers customers should wear masks and checkers should wear gloves.

While promoting greater use of disposable plastic bags by suspending the 5-cent tax is unlikely to achieve any additional worker protection, the suspension would be *very likely* to increase plastic bag trash everywhere, because what people receive for “free” they do not value and thus simply dump. And there we are back to the unhealthy, bacteria-breeding, rat inviting, and

¹ See <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/prevent-getting-sick/how-covid-spreads.html>. See also https://foodsafety.ces.ncsu.edu/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/Reusable-bags_COVID-19_Social-Media-Image.png. The North Carolina State University urges that people **not stop** using reusable bags, finding no evidence of any coronavirus health risk.

expensive trash situation existing before the tax was imposed--and we would have cut a funding source for clean-up, since the tax does provide some clean-up revenue.

Further, at what point can we say it is safe to restore the tax? The coronavirus threat is going to be with us for a very long time, ample time for shoppers to revert to the belief that plastic carryout bags at no visible additional charge are the norm.

While we oppose removing this incentive to forego disposable carryout bags, we suggest that if a checker is reluctant to touch a customer's reusable bag, the customer should simply bag the groceries herself or use the self-check.

In the end, Bill 17-20E promoting use of disposable bags, well-intentioned though it is, does not serve the health of the community; it degrades it. We urge you to reject Bill 17-20E.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Anne Ambler". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Anne" being more prominent than the last name "Ambler".

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