In most states the entire amount of the fee must stay with retailer to avoid claims of "unconstitutional taxation" because generally the state must give permission for cities to collect a tax. (Depends on the state constitution, "enabling legislation" can allow cities to adopt taxes.)
DO PLASTIC BAG LAWS WORK?

CALIFORNIA
Statewide ban on thin plastic bags (under 2.25 mils) & min 10-cent fee for paper & reusable
Law was adopted by the legislature and later approved by statewide voter referendum
151 local jurisdictions had adopted bag laws prior to upholding statewide law
A similar local law in San Jose, CA: reusable bag use increased from 4% to 62%, plastic bag litter decreased 59% on streets and 89% in storm drains

WASHINGTON, D.C.
60%+ reduction in single-use carryout bag consumption in first year
Corresponding reduction in plastic bag litter in D.C.’s Anacostia River
83% of D.C. residents and 90% of D.C. businesses support the law or are neutral

CHICAGO
Initially adopted a straight ban on all thin plastic bags (under 2.25 mils) but large chains, including Walmart, simply switched to giving away thicker plastic bags that qualify as reusable bags
In reaction, environmental groups and some retailers united to push for a 7-cent tax on all carryout bags
In the first month after the tax, the number of plastic and paper bags Chicagoans consumed at grocery stores dropped 42%

WHY REGULATE PLASTIC BAGS?

WINDBLOWN LITTER
Even if disposed of properly, plastic bags get caught in the wind
Visible in environment as litter (often caught in trees)
Litter clean-up costs taxpayers

MARINE IMPACTS
Plastic bags can entangle or choke marine life
Break down into small pieces
Sea turtles mistake for jellyfish

WASTE MANAGEMENT
There is no viable market for dirty plastic bags
Clog recycling machinery
Contaminate other recyclables

RECYCLING PLASTIC BAGS IS NOT THE ANSWER

Recycling is a commodities market: some materials more valuable than others & dirty plastic bags don’t have a viable market.
Plastic bag recycling rates are difficult to measure, estimated at ~5%.
Plastic bags often clog municipal recycling machinery when recycled curbside.

Instead of take-back recycling programs at retailers, focus should be on customers bringing their own bags (BYOBag).
Bag reduction laws (bans & fees) encourage BYOBag behavior.

WASTE MANAGEMENT HIERARCHY

By Jennie Romer, Esq, founder of plasticbaglaws.org last updated 10/1/17

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