

Press



Release

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For Immediate Release

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Rockland County Legislature Adopts Plastic Bag Ban

Legislators Santulli & Low-Hogan: Law Offers Tremendous Benefits

New City, NY (March 22, 2019) – Rockland County legislators have adopted a new law that bans most single-use plastic bags at retail outlets, restaurants and grocery stores.

In a bipartisan 14-3 vote, lawmakers backed a measure that was sponsored by County Legislators Laurie Santulli (R-Congers) and Nancy Low-Hogan (D-South Nyack). Passage followed a two-hour public hearing where speakers overwhelmingly supported the ban.

The resolution was sent to the County Executive on Wednesday. He has 21 days to approve it, veto it or take no action.

“Plastic bags not only make Rockland County look terrible, they cause problems for our solid waste facility and pose a significant threat to the environment,” Legislator Santulli said. “A simple change in our habits – switching to paper and reusable bags, will help us address these problems for the betterment of our county.”

Legislator Low-Hogan said “Passing the plastic bag ban is an example of what can happen when a community comes together in support of what is best for the whole community, not only in the short term, but in the long term. We are ready to make the choice that will benefit our environment and ultimately our world.”

Rockland is the latest of several New York state municipalities to adopt a law governing plastic bags, including Hastings-on-Hudson, Larchmont, New Paltz, Rye and earlier this year, in Piermont village.

Under the law:

- Businesses would be banned from providing any single-use plastic carryout bags. This applies to department stores, home center and hardware stores, drug stores, supermarkets, liquor stores, gas station stores, restaurants, farmers’ markets and others.

- Businesses would only be allowed to provide paper bags made of recycled materials that can be recycled, or reusable plastic bags that have handles and are machine washable or are easily cleaned and disinfected. Businesses **cannot charge a fee for the recycled paper bags.**
- The law **does not ban** plastic bags used for loose bulk items such as fruit, vegetables, butts, grains, candy, cookies, small hardware items or to wrap meats, fish, deli and frozen foods.
- The law **does not ban** bags used by pharmacies to contain prescription drugs, newspaper bags, door-hanger bags and laundry-dry cleaning bags.
- The law would be enforced by the county Office of Consumer Protection.
- Fines would range from up to \$250 for a first-time offense; up to \$500 for a second offense within a 12-month period; and up to \$1,000 for a third and each subsequent offense within a 12-month period.
- The Consumer Protection Office would also have the authority to confiscate any single-use plastic carryout bags from businesses found to be in violation.

While it seems like plastic bags have always been with us, they did not come into use in the U.S. until 1979, according to published reports. Two of the nation's largest grocery store chains – Safeway and Kroger – switched to plastic bags in 1982, and by the end of the 1980s, the use of plastic bags had replaced paper bags not only in the U.S., but around the world.

Problems associated with plastic bags began surfacing soon after. For example, in 1997, a sailor and researcher named Charles Moore discovered the Great Pacific Garbage Patch, the largest of several ocean gyres where massive amounts of plastic waste have accumulated, including plastic bags.

In waterways, plastic bags are ingested by sea turtles, which mistake them for jellyfish, whales and other aquatic life. On Saturday, a Cuvier's beaked whale was found dead on the Philippine island of Mindanao; its stomach contained 88 pounds of plastic, a significant portion of it being plastic bags. Other dead whales, as well as sea birds and other aquatic life have been found with plastic, including bags, filling their stomachs.

Here in Rockland, plastic bags can routinely be seen littering roadsides and tangled in trees. The bags get washed into our streams, lakes and rivers when it rains or there is runoff from snow melt. This happens when the bags get washed into storm drains, most of which empty into a waterway. Like in the ocean, local aquatic life, as well as wildlife, can be threatened.

Plastic bags are not recycled at the county Solid Waste Management Authority's facility in Hillburn, but they end up in the waste stream because people mistakenly mix them in with their recyclables. Legislators Santulli and Low-Hogan met with representatives of the SWMA and were told that the bags gunk up the sorting machines at the facility about three to four times per day, becoming trapped in the gears. The situation brings operations to a halt while the machines are cleaned out or parts are repaired or replaced; motors need to be replaced monthly.

Retail stores in Rockland have collection boxes where you can return your plastic bags; the stores make their own arrangements for the recycling of the bags.

"Our Rockland County community is ready for this change," Legislator Low-Hogan said. "We are ready to choose reusable bags over single use bags. This was a group-effort and I would like to thank everyone

who supports this new law. It was wonderful to see people from all of our towns, all political persuasions and people of all ages who came out in support of this new law.”

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