

Denver City Council
1437 Bannock Street, Room 451
Denver, CO 80202

October 28, 2019

Dear Members of the Denver City Council:

We are facing a global plastic pollution problem. Virtually all of the plastic ever created—about 8.3 billion tons—still exists on planet Earth. It is critical that the City of Denver join with 300 other cities across the country in taking action now to reduce plastic waste, starting first with disposable plastic bags. **We strongly urge you to support Councilwoman Black’s draft ordinance to reduce disposable bag use by charging a fee on both disposable plastic and paper bags.**

Both paper and plastic bags have negative environmental impacts. Plastic bags are made from non-renewable natural gas, are more easily littered, will not biodegrade, and pose a threat to wildlife and ecosystems. Americans currently throw away 100 billion plastic bags every year, or 300 bags per person. We use these bags for just an average of 12 minutes, but they persist in the environment. Paper bags, however, also have negative impacts. They require more water to produce, consume more energy during transport, and contribute to deforestation. Reusable bags help reduce these environmental impacts throughout the life of the bag.

Denver residents pay for the litter and pollution caused by disposable bags through their tax dollars paying for litter cleanup on our streets, at our parks and open space, and along our rivers. Disposable bags clog sorting equipment and contaminate materials at recycling centers and local composting facilities, adding to processing costs and reducing the value of outputs.

Placing a fee on the use of any disposable bag, paper or plastic, sends a clear message that one type of bag is not better than the other, and that the larger problem is the use of single-use disposable packaging. Bag fees are a proven strategy to significantly reduce the use of all disposable bags in other cities. Disposable bag use in the City of Boulder decreased by 68% within the first year. Similarly, Washington, D.C. saw a reduction of over 60%. By contrast, recycling programs for plastic bags have proven ineffective for capturing only a small percentage of the bags created, and education programs that encourage people to reuse bags have also proven ineffective at reducing overall bag use.

We believe the bag fee is an important and impactful first step towards reducing plastic pollution and climate change. **Please support Councilwoman Black’s Bag Fee Ordinance as a key first step.** We further encourage the City to explore a larger strategy to comprehensively reduce all single-use disposable plastics in the community—to address other unnecessary disposables such as straws, plastic cutlery and polystyrene takeout containers—similar to nationwide bans in place in Canada and Europe.

Sincerely,

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The Alliance Center

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