



## PennFuture

Public Testimony on Bill Number 190610 to Philadelphia City Council Committee on Licenses and Inspections  
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Good Afternoon Council Members. Thank you to Chairwoman Quinones-Sanchez for the opportunity to testify this afternoon. My name is Lena Smith. I am the campaign manager for clean water advocacy for PennFuture. PennFuture is a statewide environmental advocacy non profit. We are leading the transition to a clean energy economy in Pennsylvania and beyond. We are protecting our air, water and land, and empowering citizens to build sustainable communities for future generations.

PennFuture is working to improve water quality in the Delaware River Basin through our support for *Green City, Clean Waters*. A ban on single-use plastics and a fee on recycled paper and reusable bags will improve the water quality in the Delaware River Basin and contribute to the continued success of *Green City, Clean Waters*.

60% of Philadelphia's storm drain system is a combined system that mixes stormwater with household wastewater. Philadelphia's combined sewer systems poses a significant threat to water quality, and plastics pollution increases that threat. Stormwater – or surface water generated during a rainstorm or when snow melts – runs off roads, parking lots, and roofs, picking up oil, dirt, and pollutants like litter debris – like plastic bags – as it makes its way to storm drains. In a combined system, under normal conditions, all of this water and pollution makes its way to water treatment plants. However, most large storms cause untreated sewage and other pollutants to overflow directly into local rivers and creeks.

*Green City, Clean Waters* is an innovative approach to stormwater management led by the Philadelphia Water Department that relies heavily on green stormwater infrastructure such as rain gardens, tree trenches, and green roofs to filter stormwater through plants, soil, and stones before entering the city's combined sewer system. The city was mandated by the EPA to reduce the amount of combined sewage overflows into the rivers, creeks, and streams in and around Philadelphia. The city selected *Green City, Clean Waters* because it was identified as the most cost-effective approach to stormwater management that would also result in additional social, economic, and community benefits.

*Green City, Clean Waters* long-term success depends on maintaining projects that continue to produce benefits. However, a common criticism is that GSI features are not always sufficiently maintained and therefore become overgrown, trash strewn, and blighted. Plastic bags and bottles rank high on the list of litter clogging GSI throughout the city. They increase the need for maintenance and devalue the asset more quickly. PWD continues to increase GSI maintenance performance, but maintenance costs remain stubbornly high.

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For the city to effectively maintain our stormwater infrastructure, reduce pollution directly into our water ways, and successfully implement *Green City, Clean Waters* we support municipal action to reduce plastics consumption that is cost-effective and environmentally friendly. The “Bring Your Own Bag Bill – Bill number 190610 is a strong bill that can result in the reduction of plastics consumption and incentivization of environmental stewardship.

Generally, local governments across the country have regulated plastic bags through one of two pathways: a ban on plastic bags; or a ban on certain types of bags with a fee on others. The ban/fee hybrid is the recommended structure that is by far the most cost-effective way to change consumer behavior and reduce overall carryout bag consumption.

The fee is intended to encourage people to bring their own bags rather than paying the fee. A study looking at the response to Washington DC’s bill (5-cent tax on all bags) shows this reduction in consumption happens across all demographics. We understand the concern that low-income households may realize the impacts of the fee when a small increase in monthly expenses can have a significant impact on the overall costs of living , however, we believe there are options to address this valid concern – for one, one can Bring Your Own Bag, as the bill is aptly named, and don’t pay anything. We believe this type of law should be coupled with education and outreach with reusable bag giveaways in low-income communities. For example, New York City’s bag bill required that the Department of Sanitation work with local businesses and nonprofit organizations to do targeted outreach prioritizing reusable bag distribution in households with annual income below 200% of the federal poverty line.

A straight plastic bag ban is problematic because they often result in consumers taking whatever alternatives are still available for free. In this scenario, consumption of the remaining free paper and thicker plastic bags that qualify as “reusable bag” often increases as consumption of thin single-use plastic bags decreases. The ban/fee hybrid ordinance, as Philadelphia’s bill is crafted, has become the more effective model as cities haven’t seen a significant increase in customers bringing their own bags under a straight plastic bag ban. Under a ban/fee hybrid ordinance the ban of certain bags stays in place and a fee is added to all other carryout bags including paper and reusable bags provided by the retailer. Customers are not charged for bringing their own bags. When customers are suddenly presented with the question “Would you like to purchase a bag for that?” the evidence shows that bag consumption drops dramatically.

To conclude, PennFuture supports city council’s initiative to reduce plastics pollution through a bag fee hybrid model that will result in the greatest amount of behavior change. We encourage council to incorporate language that requires the city to provide re-usable bags for low-income communities. These actions will increase the city’s ability to continue to successfully implement the *Green City, Clean Waters* program and reduce plastics pollution in the Delaware River Basin.

