



<b>F R O M</b>	Name & Title	Letitia Dzirasa, M.D., Commissioner 	Health Department	 BALTIMORE MARYLAND
	Agency Name & Address	Health Department 1001 E. Fayette Street Baltimore, Maryland 21202	AGENCY REPORT	
	Subject: Position:	CC #19-0401 FAVORABLE W/ AMENDMENTS		

To: President and Members  
of the City Council  
c/o 409 City Hall

August 6, 2019

The Baltimore City Health Department (BCHD) is pleased to have the opportunity to review City Council Bill #19-0401, entitled "Comprehensive Bag Reduction." This legislation prohibits the distribution of certain plastic bags at a point of sale, and also imposes a surcharge on the distribution of other bags provided at a point of sale.

BCHD fully supports a shift to reusable bags in retail settings. Plastic bags intended for a single use pose both a public health and environmental risk to Baltimore City residents. At just one location along the Baltimore City harbor, the Waterfront Partnership of Baltimore notes that its "Mr. Trash Wheel" has collected "1,151 TONS of trash and debris," including "649,236 plastic bags," since its inception.

The plastic bags in question are slow to decompose and continually clog tributaries resulting in damage to marine and plant life. As these bags degrade, they contribute several potentially toxic elements into our environment, and eventually our food supply. Professor Rolf Halden, Director of the Environmental Biotechnology at the Biodesign Institute, conducted a study in 2010 that observed the spread of bisphenol-A or BPA and phthalates, both toxic to humans according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, into the food supply through the breakdown of plastics.

In a recent Baltimore Sun article addressing litter, the Department of Public Works stated, "With 694 staff members to handle 210,000 households over nearly 90 square miles, [the City's] Solid Waste Bureau does not have enough resources to effectively clean up behind more than 600,000 city residents." The article further mentioned that, in distressed communities, environmental trash and debris often goes unattended by passersby and City workers for fear of what may be found in said litter or potential run-ins with the drug trade. These distressed communities plagued by litter risk greater exposure to the potential health risks associated with the breakdown of plastic bags. Moreover, the proliferation of said bags and litter add to existing blight, which carries with it additional public health concerns.

While BCHD understands and supports a shift to reusable bags in a retail context, there are some operational impacts posed by 19-0401 that must be addressed. In particular, there is

concern regarding whether the Department's enforcement officers will be able to accommodate 311 requests outside of their regular duties, as well as the bill's enforcement mechanisms. The Department recommends the following amendments:

- On page 4, in line 25, strike “*{RESERVED}*” and substitute “**AGENCIES TO ENFORCE.**”; on that same page, after line 25, insert:
  - **“ENFORCEMENT OF THIS SUBTITLE SHALL BE CONDUCTED BY “CODE ENFORCEMENT OFFICERS”, AS DEFINED IN CITY CODE ARTICLE 1, § 40-1(C), IN THE COURSE OF THEIR REGULAR DUTIES.”**
- On page 6, strike lines 3 through 5 in their entirety and substitute:
  - **“ANY DEALER WHO VIOLATES ANY PROVISION OF THIS SUBTITLE AFTER HAVING TWICE RECEIVED AN ENVIRONMENTAL CITATION WITH A FINAL DISPOSITION OTHER THAN NOT GUILTY IS GUILTY OF A MISDEMEANOR AND, ON CONVICTION, IS SUBJECT TO A FINE OF NOT MORE THAN \$1,000 FOR EACH OFFENSE.”**

With consideration of the above amendments and the risks posed by plastic bags intended for a single use, BCHD urges a **favorable with amendments** report on Council Bill #19-0401.