

HB134
Annapolis Green
In Support of HB134
Environment–Single–Use Plastic Straws – Use in Restaurants

Good afternoon. My name is Elvia Thompson and I am Co-founder and President of Annapolis Green, a local nonprofit that advocates for sustainability and protection of the environment. My office is at State Circle and Maryland Avenue. You probably pass it every day during session.

Last year, during Annapolis Restaurant Week, my organization launched a campaign to bring attention to the environmental damage caused by single-use plastics and we used the plastic straw to build that awareness. My organization is thrilled to support this bill.

What is so important about something as small and insignificant as a plastic straw? Plastic straws are one of the top items found in shoreline clean ups all over the world. Over 500 MILLION plastic straws are used in the United States EVERY DAY. Globally that amounts to a **billion**, yes, a **billion**, plastic straws used worldwide EVERY DAY.

There are several concerns about single-use plastic straws.

First, with the exception of people with specific medical conditions that make drinking directly from a glass or cup very difficult, straws aren't really needed. Over the past few decades, the restaurant industry has added this product to our beverages without asking if we want it. More and more of us are now saying no to the plastic straws.

Second, plastic is made from fossil fuels. If we are to leave our children with a planet that is livable, we must stop the continuous flow of carbon in the atmosphere caused by fossil fuels. The less plastic that is made, the less petroleum is used.

Third, the very qualities that make plastic part of our everyday lives are what make it an environmental hazard. It is lightweight and therefore, easily picked up by the wind to become litter. And litter on land quickly becomes litter in our waterways. Plastic straws, like plastic cutlery, are too small to be recyclable. Plastic does not biodegrade. The plastic straw that is plunked into a water glass at a restaurant is used for maybe 30 minutes, thrown away, and then it exists in our environment essentially forever. Plastic does not go away. It just breaks up into smaller and smaller pieces that wildlife, marine animals in particular, mistake for food. Plastic is choking our waterways and water is truly the lifeblood of our existence.

Fourth, plastic is a public health issue because it attracts toxins. In its tiniest forms, plastic has already entered the food chain. There are tiny bits of plastic in our bodies right now. Anything that we can do to eliminate unnecessary use of plastic, such as straws, is good for the environment and good for our health.

This bill advocates exactly what Annapolis Green did in our “Don’t Suck, #SipResponsibly” straw campaign. With that catchy name and public education, we had an effect on close to 40 restaurants in this area. Those establishments are either serving plastic straws only on request, are serving paper straws only, are serving compostable straws only, or not serving straws at all. Some are even serving straws made of pasta. They all agree that going this route demonstrates their commitment to the environment. I have no doubt that the pressure applied to them by customers who heard of our campaign, or just read about the issue in the news media, has had an effect. Several local restaurants have signage in their establishments letting customers know their position on this.

As to the cost: Yes, plastic straws are the least expensive straw option. But it’s all about policies and staff training. If a straw is served only upon request the slightly higher cost of paper, for example, is more than offset by the lower number used.

Many cities have banned plastic straws outright as have some airlines, and entire countries in Europe. In California, dine-in restaurants are banned from offering them unless asked. Several waterfront cities have banned them from their beaches.

Our ongoing goal is to advocate and see a reduction of single use plastics in our community. Straws are just a start. Plastic stirrers and the ubiquitous plastic water bottle and plastic bag also do harm to our Bay and oceans. Measures such as this bill and peer pressure will continue to reduce the use of plastic straws, polystyrene, plastic bags and water bottles.

We launched our campaign during the 2018 Annapolis Restaurant Week, and it has been a great success. But the campaign continues. Annapolis Green is uniting with other organizations and communities around the world to draw attention to the excessive and unnecessary use of plastic straws. We are also taking it a step further in acknowledging that in some instances, for medical reasons, straws are needed. In that case we encourage people to *#SipResponsibly* with a biodegradable paper straw.

We commend delegate Love and her co-sponsors for drawing attention to a small, yet important step we can take to reduce our plastic footprint. Many small actions equal big impacts.