May 14, 2018

The Honorable. Andrew M. Cuomo
Governor
State of New York
Executive Chamber
New York State Capitol
Albany, NY 12224

RE: Plastic Bag Pollution

Dear Governor Cuomo:

We, the undersigned, strongly support New York State enacting a comprehensive policy to curb the use of single-use bags this legislative session.

As you are aware, our organizations have worked with municipalities throughout New York to successfully enact policies that reduce disposable bag use and encourage consumers to switch to reusable alternatives. We applaud your commitment to address plastic bag pollution on a state-wide level and we want to work with your office to enact an effective, comprehensive program this year. In February of 2017, you met with several environmental groups to discuss the state preempting New York City’s carryout bag reduction law. We discussed the importance of reducing plastic pollution that ultimately should be accomplished on a state-wide level. We were heartened to hear you assert your commitment to take a leadership role over this issue.

However, we cannot support your legislation as it is currently written. Given our experience with Bring Your Own Bag (BYOBag) policies, a plastic bag ban only will have unintended adverse consequences and therefore, needs to be accompanied by a fee on other disposable bags. Additionally, we urge that any new law retain effective local laws unless the new law is equal to or stronger than existing local laws.

Taking into account lessons learned from residents, businesses, and municipalities around the state and country who have enacted Bring Your Own Bag policies, we are writing to urge you to advance a policy that bans single-use plastic bags and places a fee on all other bags (both paper and reusable bags). An effective state policy should be modeled after municipalities that have successfully addressed this issue. A ban/fee hybrid is the most successful model of BYOBag policy in the United States. Los Angeles County achieved a 94 percent reduction in single-use bags, including a 30 percent reduction in paper bag use, after implementing a ban on single-use plastic bags with a 10-cent fee on other bags, including paper. San Jose has similar legislation to Los Angeles and documented an 89 percent decrease of bags in storm drains, 60 percent fewer in creeks, and 59 percent fewer in streets. Based on these successful policies, the Town of New Castle became the first municipality in NY to enact a ban/fee hybrid, with a ban on single-use plastic bags and a 10-cent fee on paper which went into effect in January of 2017.
In contrast to these successful ordinances, Chicago simply banned plastic bags and did not place a fee on paper. As a consequence of this incomplete policy, many stores switched to slightly thicker plastic bags and labeled them as “reusable” resulting in an increase of waste and undermining efforts to curb single-use bag consumption. In 2016, Chicago chose to switch from a ban to a 7-cent fee on disposable bags. In New York, the City of Long Beach and Suffolk County placed a fee on all bags instead of implementing a plastic bag ban and both are experiencing a dramatic reduction in disposable bag use. Meanwhile, municipalities in Westchester and Long Island chose to ban plastic bags with no fee component on other disposable bags and these communities have failed to see lasting consumer behavior change.

It is critical that New York moves forward with a policy that addresses both plastic and other disposable bags using the most successful policies as models. We urge you to ban single-use plastic bags and place a fee on paper and reusable bags and we recommend that a portion of the fee collected is dedicated to state parks, environmental improvement projects and reducing potential impacts to low/moderate income communities.

Sincerely,

350Brooklyn
350NYC
AAUW Kingston
All Our Energy
Alliance for the Great Lakes
Amalgamated Ecogroup
Bedford 2020 Coalition
Big Reuse
Bronx Climate Justice North
Cafeteria Culture
Catskill Mountainkeeper
Church Women United in New York State
Citizens Campaign for the Environment
Citizens Committee for New York City
Cleanup North Brooklyn
ClientEarth US
Coalition Against Pilgrim Pipelines
Coalition to Protect New York
Coalition to Save Hempstead Harbor
Coastal Preservation Network
Coastal Research and Education Society of Long Island
Creations
Transformative Energy Task Force, Sisters of Charity of New York
Croton Climate Initiative
Dancewave, Inc.
Dominican Sisters of Hope
EcoPel - Environmental Coalition of the Pelhams
EldersClimateAction
Empire State Consumer Project, Inc.
Environmental Advocates of New York
Fifth Avenue Committee
First Reformed Church
Firsthand Learning, Inc.
Food & Water Watch
Franciscan Sisters of the Atonement
Gas Free Seneca
Grassroots Environmental Education
Greater New York Labor Religion Coalition
Green Education and Legal Fund
Green Ossining
Green Sanctuary Committee, CCNY, UU
Green Schools Alliance
Harlem Climate Caucus
Healing and Protecting Our Land Together - A Call To Prayer
Hudson River Sloop Clearwater
Human Impacts Institute
LES Ecology Center
Manhattan Solid Waste Advisory Board
Mass Green Network
Metro NY Catholic Climate Movement
National Parks Conservation Association
Natural Resources Defense Council
Neighbors Allied for Good Growth
New Castle Sustainability Advisory Board
New York League of Conservation Voters
Newtown Creek Alliance
North American Climate, Conservation and Environment
North Shore Audubon Society
NWF NYC Eco-Schools
NY Buddhist Climate Action Network
NY/NJ Baykeeper
NYC Friends of Clearwater
NYC H2O
NYPIRG
Operation Splash
Orange Residents Against Pilgrim Pipelines
Parents Community Service Network
PAUSE - People of Albany United for Safe Energy
Plastic Pollution Coalition
plasticbaglaws.org
Plymouth Friends for Clean Water
Protect Orange County
Rainforest Relief
Riverkeeper
Religious Organizations Along the River
Rockland Sierra Club
Save The Great South Bay
Scarsdale Forum
Sustainability Committee
Seneca Lake Guardian
Serpentine Art and Nature Commons, Inc.
Setauket Harbor Task Force
Sierra Club Atlantic Chapter
Sierra Club Niagara Group
Sierra Club Niagara Group
Sixth Street Community Center
Sludge Stoppers Task Force
South Asian Fund for Education, Scholarship and Training
SUNY New Paltz Environmental Task Force
Surfrider Foundation, Central Long Island Chapter
Surfrider Foundation, Eastern Long Island
Surfrider Foundation, NYC Chapter
Sustainability Collaborative
Sustainable Saratoga
Sustainable Warwick
The Buffalo NY Ocean Coalition
The FUND for Lake George
The Heights Urban Empowerment, Inc.
The Nature Conservancy in New York
Tompkins County Environmental Management Council
Unitarian Universalist Women’s Association-Metro District
United for Action
Upper Green Side Waterkeeper Alliance
WeHateToWaste.com
WESPAC Foundation
West 80s Neighborhood Association
Western NY
Environmental Alliance
White Plains
Econeighbors
Working Class Dutchess