



Ho. Co. 12-22 – Howard County – Disposable Bag Fees – Exemption

Position: Support

November 16, 2021

The Association of Community Services (ACS) represents over 150 member organizations and community advocates in Howard County. As a crucial part of the infrastructure for providing services in Howard County, our members directly see and try to address the needs of our community. We urge you to support Ho.Co. 12-22 to create an exemption from paying disposable bag fees for people utilizing the Supplemental Nutritional Assistance Program (SNAP) and Women, Infants, and Children program (WIC).

While we support addressing the impacts of single-use disposable bags on our environment and recognize that environmental issues have disparate impacts on populations, we must also be attentive to how solutions to environmental challenges impact various communities as well. Howard County is widely known for the wealth of many residents, therefore, there can be a presumption that every resident can easily handle disposable bag fees. Charging five cents for disposable bags is a viable mechanism for curbing the use of single-use plastic bags while encouraging the use of reusable bags when shopping, and yet, depending on one's income, those fees can create many challenges in affording basic needs.

Our FY 2020 [Self-Sufficiency Indicators Report](#) shows that SNAP provided benefits for 8,952 households, totaling 18,022 participants, in Howard County. The County also saw 4,021 WIC participants in the last fiscal year. Given that nearly 1 out of every 4 renter households in Howard County pay more than 50% of their income on rent, many people do not have much money for food, medicine, clothing, etc. SNAP and WIC both have strict guidelines around what can be purchased with those benefits, and neither can be used for non-food items, such as plastic bags. If someone forgets their reusable bag or hasn't had the money to purchase any reusable bags, they could easily face a situation of deciding to try to carry all of their groceries in their arms or put food items back in order to afford the plastic bag fees. Many are struggling to make ends meet in Howard County and we should not be adding to financial burdens to people who can least afford them.

We know how to work together and be creative to meet the challenges we face in Howard County. Exempting people who utilize SNAP and WIC from having to pay disposable bag fees would help keep money in their pockets for other needs and ensure that they can purchase as much food as possible under their benefits. Other states have taken similar action to show that we can protect the environment *and* support the needs of people living in poverty at the same time. With that, we urge to vote favorably for Ho.Co. 12-22.

Thank you,

Joan Driessen

Joan Driessen
Executive Director