



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

Position: Support

January 25, 2022

The Association of Community Services (ACS) represents over 150 member organizations and community advocates in Howard County. In November, we urged you to support Ho.Co. 12-22 and we are writing once again to be part of the discussion around this proposed legislation.

Many of us grew up learning “Reduce, Reuse, Recycle” as a key way to support the environment. We certainly applaud the positive impact of the disposable bag fee in reducing our waste by shifting from a greater use of disposable bags and moving people to utilize reusable bags. At the same time, we need to be attentive to and find relief for people when they share that actions, such as charging a fee for disposable bags that were previously free, create added challenges and barriers for them. Disposable bags are often reused as lunch bags, backpacks, covers for shoes in the rain, trash can liners, to give donations to nonprofits, etc. before being disposed – they do not solely end up as litter in trees and waterways. Let’s also recognize that when many people have tried to find alternatives to disposable bags, such as bringing an empty backpack or large bag into a store to carry purchased items, they may confront explicit or implicit store policies in certain neighborhoods that prohibit entry if you have a backpack or certain types of bags, and leave them with few options.

Once again, we draw your attention to our latest [Self-Sufficiency Indicators Report](#) and infographics on [food access and insecurity](#) and [housing](#) which show that nearly 1 in 4 HCPSS students receive Free and Reduced Meals, thereby indicating the income struggles of families in the County. Nearly 1 out of every 4 renter households in Howard County pay more than 50% of their income on rent, which means that many people do not have much money for food, medicine, clothing, etc. Even though Howard County has significant wealth and recently passed legislation to accelerate minimum wage increases locally, present inflation and many other factors leave people struggling.

It sounds like the challenge here is that, in creating the disposable bag fee, we did not build in a strong mechanism to ensure that everyone can be supported in this shift. Given that neither SNAP nor WIC can be used to purchase non-food items, such as plastic bags or reusable bags, and one-time reusable bag giveaways did not reach everyone, now is the time to find solutions that support both people who utilize SNAP and WIC and the environment. 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. With that, we urge to vote favorably for Ho.Co. 12-22 to enable the County Council to dive deeper into this issue and work out solutions that support our community.

Thank you,

Joan Driessen

Joan Driessen
Executive Director