

## Testimony on LD 108

Dick Atlee, MDI A Climate to Thrive, Zero-Waste Committee

Thank you for the opportunity to testify on LD 108.

Of the three identical ban-the-bag-ban bills, this is the only one to clearly specify the motivation that lies behind all three — the claimed potential health threat of using reusable bags for groceries in the current coronavirus situation.

Unfortunately, this claim has been known to be false for at least 8 months.

Its source is not in question. On March 18 of last year, the Plastics Industry Association — the PIA — wrote a letter making that claim:

<https://www.politico.com/states/f/?id=00000171-0d87-d270-a773-6fdfcc4d0000>

to HHS head Alex Azar, referencing "study after study after study" and concluding:

"We are asking that the Department of Health and Human Services...

- make a public statement on the health and safety benefits seen in single-use plastics,...
- speak out against bans on these products as a public safety risk, and
- help stop the rush to ban these products by environmentalists and elected officials that puts consumers and workers at risk."

However, less than two months later, researchers from the Virginia Institute of Marine Science dismantled all three of the PIA's cited studies. Their article, entitled "Single-Use Plastics and COVID-19: Scientific Evidence and Environmental Regulations," was published in the American Chemical Society's journal of *Environmental Science and Technology*:

<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC7291777/>

It showed that the PIA-cited studies concerned *digestive* pathogens, not *respiratory* viruses that have pandemic potential. The only possibly problematic bag contamination was found *inside* the bags. The article also referenced a 2011 study of the frequency-of-use of reusable bags, which found that the intervals of non-use were longer than the virus can survive on surfaces.

The case of Dr. Ryan Sinclair is instructive. His earlier study on a *digestive* virus prompted him to recommend against reusables at the same time as the PIA letter. By September, however, he had come around to recommending using cloth bags and washing them.

A final nail in the coffin of the deadly-reusables myth might be found in a June statement, signed by 115 international health experts:

[https://www.greenpeace.org/usa/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/Health-Expert-Statement\\_Updated.pdf](https://www.greenpeace.org/usa/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/Health-Expert-Statement_Updated.pdf)

They pointed out the essentially equal health risk of reusable and single-use items in general, not just bags. In terms of keeping retail workers safe from infection, they recommended using the FDA's hygienic practices for retail, and following these logical steps recommended by California's OSHA:

- don't touch or place groceries in customer brought bags,
- ask customers to leave their own bags in the shopping cart, and
- ask customers to bag their own groceries

I do this, as do many of my friends.

It is unfortunate that the unhealthy-recyclables canard has again reared its head despite contrary scientific understanding of the matter. I hope the committee will put it to rest once and for all by voting Not-To-Pass.

Thank you.