



Memo of Opposition

S.7336 (Felder)/ A.9904 (Cusick)

AN ACT to amend the general city law, in relation to prohibiting the imposition of any tax, fee or local charge on carry out merchandise bags

May 9, 2016

Riverkeeper and NY/NJ Baykeeper are both member-supported watchdog organizations, part of the international Waterkeeper Alliance. Riverkeeper is dedicated to defending the environmental, recreational and commercial integrity of the Hudson River and safeguarding the Watershed that provides drinking water to nine million New York City and Hudson Valley residents. NY/NJ Baykeeper works to protect, preserve, and restore the NY-NJ Harbor Estuary.

We strongly oppose S.7335 (Felder)/ A.9904 (Cusick) and urge the state legislature to reject this legislation. The purpose of the bill is to usurp the self-determination authority of local governments to place a fee or tax on single use bags. Riverkeeper and NY/NJ Baykeeper support the efforts of local governments to use all the tools at their disposal – such as education, recycling, taxes and fees – to reduce their waste impacts on the Hudson River, greater NY Harbor, and its tributaries.

The annual Riverkeeper Sweep, the Hudson River's largest cleanup event, engages thousands of volunteers from NYC to Albany who in 2015 removed 40 tons of trash – largely plastic – from the Hudson River and its tributaries in a single day. Over four years, from 2012 to 2015, Sweep volunteers have removed 116 tons of trash and recyclables. A persistent component of this trash consists of single use plastic bags. Efforts to reduce the release of plastic bags and other forms of litter into the Hudson River watershed are a core component of Riverkeeper's Trash Free Hudson campaign. The passage of New York City's law to limit plastic bag use is an important step towards addressing the problem of litter and debris in the Hudson River Watershed and throughout our local environment.

Residents of New York City use nearly 9.37 billion carry out bags per year. The costs of disposing this volume of single use bags can reach nearly \$12.5 million per year. Often these bags can clog storm drains, exacerbating the City's combined sewage overflow crisis. Additionally, these bags contribute to the microplastic problem in the New York/New Jersey Harbor highlighted by NY/NJ Baykeeper's Harbor-Estuary Collection Report released February 2016. The study estimated that at least 165 million plastic particles are floating within Harbor waters. Use of the plastic bag is not free for taxpayers and New York's waters. The state legislature should encourage greater action to deal with our litter problem, not pass laws to deter action.

Riverkeeper and NY/NJ Baykeeper strongly oppose this legislation and urge the legislature to reject this bill.

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