



April 4, 2024

To: House Committee on Environment and Natural Resources

Re: **H7515 – Microplastics Reduction Act**

Position: **SUPPORT**

Dear Chairperson Bennett and Honorable Members of the Committee,

As an organization dedicated to clean water, we care deeply about reducing water pollution from emerging contaminants. And there are two emerging pollutants that are particularly concerning and require special attention: the first is toxic PFAS chemicals (see H7356), and the other is microplastics.

Microplastics – which are defined as small pieces of plastic smaller than 5 millimeters – are a growing water quality problem both in Rhode Island, and throughout the world. Generally speaking, there are two types of microplastics: those that are formed when larger pieces of plastic enter the environment and are broken down into smaller pieces; and those are designed as microplastics when they're added to products (which we also call intentionally-added microplastics.) Some of the products that contain intentionally-added microplastics include cosmetics, detergents, paints and coatings, waxes and polishes, seed coatings and fertilizers, and artificial turf.

Microplastics are everywhere. Every water body in the state where samples have been taken – microplastics have been found. Last year, researchers at the University of Rhode Island found there is now roughly 1,000 tons of microplastic in the bottom sediment in Narragansett Bay, and that the rate of microplastic deposition has increased in recent years. And, given that water primarily flows *out* of the Bay (as opposed to *into* the Bay) it's safe to say that most of that microplastic is coming from sources right here in Rhode Island, which means that actions we take as a state to reduce microplastic pollution will have a local benefit.

Shellfish – which are filter feeders – are an important part of Rhode Island's economy and culture. What is the impact of all of this microplastic on shellfish populations, which we know have been declining in recent years?

Microplastics are increasingly being found in the human body – including in stool, lung and placenta samples - and we're just starting to understand what sort of health impacts that may be having. Dr. Jaime Ross at the University of Rhode Island has conducted groundbreaking research on the health impacts of microplastics in mice, and her findings are extremely concerning. (See Dr. Ross's written testimony for more details on her research and findings.)

House bill 7515 would do two things:

134 Thurbers Ave, Providence, RI 02905

Phone 401.331.6972 | jthorp@cleanwater.org

www.CleanWaterAction.org/RI

- 1) The bill would ban intentionally-added microplastics from products sold in the state starting in 2028. (The European Union has already taken similar action.)
- 2) The bill would require the Department of Environmental Management to adopt a testing plan for microplastic so that we can better understand the sources, and enact targeted solutions.

Despite the fact that we know microplastics are in all of our waterbodies, and we know there's a thousand tons of it in the Bay, we don't really know where it's coming from because we don't currently require any testing for microplastics from wastewater plants, or stormwater outfalls, or even drinking water. There is no plan for how we're going to remove the microplastic that's already in the Bay. But, at the very least, we should have some sort of sampling and testing plan – some sort of strategy – to start to get a handle on the problem and understand where it's coming from.

Our question for the General Assembly is: how much microplastic is too much? How much microplastic in the Bay is too much? Is 1,000 tons in the Bay enough for us to take action? How much microplastic needs to be in our bodies before we do something? Surely, we shouldn't just accept that our waters - and our bodies - are just going to become increasingly full of plastic for the foreseeable future. If you believe that something should be done – we urge you to pass this bill.

Thank you for considering our comments.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Jed Thorp", with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Jed Thorp
Rhode Island Director, Clean Water Action