



Wildlife over Plastics testimony on HB26-7910 and HB-7911

Thank you chairman and committee members. My name is Rex Wilmoth and I am the Director for Environment Rhode Island. We rise in support of HB-7910 and HB-7911.

Plastics harm wildlife. Too often, animals mistake plastics for food and ingest it. We've all seen pictures of ocean animals like sea turtles and whales with pounds of plastic found in their stomachs. Scientists have found plastic pollution in literally hundreds of species including bald eagles and smallmouth bass.

Rhode Island has an important role to play to keep plastics away from animals and out of our waterways. We are home to rivers like the Pawtuxet, Pawcatuck and Blackstone rivers. Those rivers should carry water, not plastic pollution to the Bay and Atlantic ocean.

But plastic is not just found in our oceans. It's impacting our ecosystems right here in Rhode Island. These microplastics are so common they are in our rain and snow and contaminate our ecosystem. These microplastics are even small enough to get inhaled and lodged in lungs.

We need to reduce the amount of plastic we produce, especially all the unnecessary plastic packaging we don't want and can't avoid. Like the plastic wrap that comes around a bunch of bananas or a tube of toothpaste that is already wrapped in a cardboard box. We've all had the experience of ordering something online and having our package arrive only to discover numerous layers of individual plastic packaging that comes wrapped around different items in the box.

What's particularly frustrating is so much of this plastic is used once to wrap something but then stays with us for centuries. Plastic takes hundreds of years to biodegrade if it ever does. Recycling is not the only answer - in Rhode Island, we only recycle 26% of the plastic containers and packaging in the state and most plastics are not easy to recycle.

For too long, manufacturers of plastic have put the responsibility of dealing with plastic – recycling and disposal – on the shoulders of individuals and local communities once they're

done being used. We need to reduce unnecessary waste and stop allowing producers to pass the responsibility of plastics' end-life costs off to us to deal with it.

Instead, we need to put the responsibility of dealing with this plastic waste back onto the producers of this packaging. If they have the responsibility for the plastics that can't be reused or recycled easily, they'll stop producing a lot of it to begin with.

So we're working to pass a producer responsibility bill that will require that manufacturers pay for any plastic packaging they send our way, push companies to make more reusable, compostable or recyclable packaging and reward companies that eliminate excessive packaging.

Dozens of countries have some form of producer responsibility including Canada. Here in the U.S. our sister groups in Maine and Oregon helped pass producer responsibility bills in their states.

Now's the time in our state. We need to tackle bottle and plastic packaging pollution by shifting the paradigm and putting the responsibility on the companies to reduce unnecessary plastics.

Given a single bottle or piece of plastic packaging can pollute our environment for hundreds of years, we can't afford to wait. We need to turn off the tap of plastic pollution.

So by passing producer responsibility policy, we can shift the costs of plastics to the companies that use this unnecessary packaging. That creates a disincentive for them to use it and will result in less plastic packaging overall. That will mean less plastic packaging will get into our environment and pollute our ecosystems. Healthier ecosystems means healthier wildlife.

Please vote yes on HB-7911 and HB-7910.

Thank you committee chair and committee.

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