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Testimony of

Christopher Carlozzi, State Director, National Federation of Independent Business
In Opposition to House Bill No. 7065
Relating to Health and Safety – Plastic Waste Reduction Act
Before the House Committee on Environment and Natural Resources
January 27, 2022

Chairman Bennett and Members of the House Committee on Environment and Natural Resources:

My name is Christopher Carlozzi. I am the Rhode Island State Director of the National Federation of Independent Business (NFIB). A non-profit, non-partisan organization, NFIB is the nation's and Rhode Island's largest small business advocacy group. In Rhode Island, NFIB represents hundreds of small and independent business owners involved in all types of industry, including manufacturing, retail, wholesale, service, and agriculture. The average NFIB member has five employees and annual gross revenues of about \$450,000. In short, NFIB represents the small Main Street business owners from across the state. On behalf of those small and independent business employers in Rhode Island, I urge you to oppose House Bill No. 7065 banning the use of plastic shopping bags.

This proposal will increase operating costs for businesses while failing to have an appreciably positive impact on the environment. The bill also negatively impacts two industries hardest hit by the pandemic: retail shops and restaurants. It is important to note that paper bags are more expensive than plastic bags and that cost will be passed along to consumers already facing higher prices due to inflation, product shortages, and higher labor costs. Small businesses, struggling to recover from the state mandated shutdowns and restrictions, are doing everything possible to prevent permanent closure and keep Rhode Islanders employed. It is no time to raise costs for these businesses who have done everything imaginable to endure this crisis. They adhered to the many rules and restrictions the state of Rhode Island imposed on them to operate during COVID, which meant new expenses for PPE, sanitization, plexiglass, all while revenue declined. Adding new costs would further threaten Rhode Island's economic recovery.

Most retail establishments already offer a choice of carryout bags (paper, plastic, reusable) and allow the customer to decide which option best suits their needs. Those shoppers that opt for a plastic bag usually do so because it is durable enough to carry their goods to their destination. Some choose plastic because inclement weather would result in a paper bag falling apart or require a stronger plastic bag to carry their goods for a prolonged trip using public transit. Retailers want to ensure the customer is content, but that goal would be unattainable if a consumer's goods tumble to the sidewalk because a bag lacked durability.

Consumers should be made aware of the numerous plastic bag recycling options already in use by many stores across the state. These recycled bags take on a second life as green building material, crates, containers and a myriad of other products. While some residents needlessly pollute by discarding bags on the ground, it is common practice in most households to reuse bags as trash can liners, dog waste containment or lunch bags. A 2019 University of Sydney study showed that while plastic shopping bags were banned in California, shoppers still required plastic bags to line garbage cans or dispose of pet waste. Researchers found, the retail sale of small 4-gallon plastic bags increased by 120% and are far more plastic intensive than shopping bags. These proposals will have little impact on those individuals who unnecessarily pollute but it will have serious cost implications on small businesses and those consumers who dutifully find second uses for recycled plastic bags.

It is also important to remember that during the pandemic many states and communities reversed plastic bag bans due to the health risk to workers and consumers. Many health officials felt using reusable bags were used for multiple purposes, handled by different individuals, and were seldom washed properly. This led many states and municipalities to, once again, allow plastic bag use as a more sanitary solution.

NFIB strongly opposes any attempts to ban the use of plastic bags and instead favors increased promotion and education efforts toward existing reduce/reuse/recycle programs. We urge you to reject House Bill No. 7065, thank you.