

SENATOR BECCA RAUSCH

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CONTACT

Gray Milkowski, Office of Senate President Karen E. Spilka

Gray.Milkowski@masenate.gov

Adrian Pforzheimer, Office of Senator Rebecca L. Rausch

Adrian.Pforzheimer@masenate.gov

Massachusetts Senate Acts to Ban Plastic Bags, Reduce Straw and Plasticware Usage, Boost Recycling and Composting

Measures would reduce plastic waste, a major threat to the environment, climate goals, and public health

(BOSTON—6/20/2024) Today the Massachusetts Senate passed legislation that builds on the state’s climate and environmental leadership by banning single-use plastic bags, making straws and plasticware available by request only, and making it easier to recycle. The legislation passed by a vote of 38-2.

“From microplastics in our blood to plastic bags in our waterways to greenhouse gases in our air, plastics pollute and harm our people and planet,” **Senator Rebecca L. Rausch (D-Needham), Senate Chair of the Joint Committee on Environment.** “The Plastics Reduction Act will prevent billions of single-use plastic bags, bottles, cutlery, and wipes from clogging up our environment, pipes, and landfills each year. This is a major win for our climate, our wildlife, and our health. I’m grateful to Senate President Karen Spilka, Senate Ways and Means Chair Michael Rodrigues, and the many colleagues, staff, experts, and advocates whose partnership and contributions brought this bill across the Senate finish line.”

“In Massachusetts, we take pride in being a leader when it comes to protecting our environment and people’s health, and this bill continues that leadership” said **Senate President Karen E. Spilka (D-Ashland)**. “Limiting our plastics use means less trash in our water ways and on our streets, and giving our kids the green, clean planet they deserve to inherit. This is a crucial part of achieving the Commonwealth’s climate goals, and I want to thank Senator Rausch for her leadership, Chair Rodrigues, our members, and every advocate who has spoken up on this issue, for their hard work.”

“This vital legislation is another step forward towards eradicating plastics, a top environmental offender, in our everyday life,” said **Senator Michael J. Rodrigues (D-Westport), Chair of the Senate Committee on Ways and Means**. “We need to continue to move away from harmful plastics and throwaway products, like Europe has, and prioritize bio and eco friendly products and services to stay abreast of the global economy. I thank Senator Rausch for her unrelenting perseverance in moving this legislation forward once again. I’m hopeful this is the first of many!”

[S.2830](#), *An Act to reduce plastic* would drastically reduce plastic waste that is too often found in streets and waterways—and too often fills landfills and disposal sites—ultimately harming the environment in Massachusetts communities and contributing to global climate change. Plastics are also made using fossil fuels.

The legislation will prohibit carry-out plastic bags at retail stores statewide and require stores to charge 10 cents for recycled paper bags, five cents of which will be allocated to environmental protection measures. The bill provides a limited exemption from the requirement to collect 10 cents for small local retailers. As of May 2023, 162 Massachusetts cities and towns, making up nearly 70 per cent of the state’s population, [already regulated single-use plastic bags](#).

The bill will also prevent plastic utensils and straws from automatically being given to consumers, prohibit single-use plastic bottle purchases by state agencies, and create a statewide program for recycling large plastic objects such as car seats.

In an effort to reduce the \$10 million annually in avoidable costs directly caused by the flushing of non-flushable wipes, the bill will require non-flushable wipes to be clearly labeled with “Do Not Flush” warnings to prevent disruptions to the Commonwealth’s sewer system.

The legislation also asks Massachusetts to lead by example, eliminating the purchasing of plastic bottles by state agencies, and codifying the Healey-Driscoll Administration’s [2023 Executive Order](#) on single-use plastic bottles.

The bill would boost composting, the natural recycling of organic food scraps and materials, by directing the Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) to submit a report on the Commonwealth's progress toward expanding access to composting. It also establishes a new commission to make recommendations on ways in which the state can encourage or require businesses to support recycling of efforts for the products that they produce.

It is the second time the Massachusetts Senate has taken action to prohibit single-use plastic bags in the Commonwealth.

Having passed the Senate, the legislation now goes to the House of Representatives for consideration.

STATEMENTS OF SUPPORT

“It is past time for Massachusetts to shut off the plastic tap to protect human health and the climate,” said **Kirstie Pecci, Executive Director of Just Zero**. “Plastic grocery bags and other filmy and small plastic items are not going to get recycled – they just contaminate valuable recyclable materials. This bill would move Massachusetts businesses and residents to adopt reusables like cloth grocery bags, reusable food ware, and refillable glass bottles, and is long overdue.”

“Reducing plastics is an environment issue, a public health issue, and a climate issue,” said **Sam Anderson, Director of Legislative and Government Affairs at Mass Audubon**. “I congratulate the many communities across the state that have taken the bold step to ban or regulate plastic waste on the local level, but taking this initiative statewide will have even greater impact. Kudos to the Senate for making sure the standard set by these towns is the new baseline necessary to ensure a sustainable and healthy future.”

“Nothing we use for just a few minutes should pollute the environment for decades,” said **Janet Domenitz, Executive Director of MASSPIRG**. “Getting rid of single use plastic bags, food ware and more will reduce plastic waste, cut down on litter and make a cleaner, greener future for everyone.”

“We would like to thank Senator Rausch, Senate President Spilka and all the legislators who have brought us to this historic point in the fight against plastic pollution in the Commonwealth,” **Clint Richmond, Conservation Chair of the Massachusetts Sierra Club**. “Massachusetts now has the opportunity to join with the many states that have passed laws to address the plastic problem. We look forward to working with the legislature to get the bill delivered to the Governor.”

“ELM commends the Massachusetts Senate for their ongoing commitment to meeting our climate and conservation challenges with strong legislation aimed at deploying renewable energy, protecting nature, and reducing polluting waste,” said **David Melly, Legislative Director for the Environmental League of Massachusetts**. “The net-zero transition represents a watershed opportunity to improve the way we engage with communities, protect valuable land and water, and address disproportionate burdens when we site, permit, and plan infrastructure. And comprehensive action on waste reduction will both support our climate goals and reduce damage to the very same natural resources we’re working to protect.”

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