



Student Toolkit for Advocacy

Legislation: Small fee on disposable plastic and paper bags

For More Information:

Laura Chamberlin, lchamberlin@fergusonfoundation.org, 202-580-5897

Program Manager, Trash Free Potomac Watershed Initiative

Alice Ferguson Foundation

www.trashfreepotomac.org, www.trashfreemaryland.org, www.trashfreevirginia.org

Why do we need a small fee on bags?

- Reduce litter in our neighborhoods and waterways. **Plastic bag use could drop 60% or more.**
- Save retailers money since they are giving away fewer bags. A single shop owner could save upwards of \$1,000 per year.
- Save consumers money by eliminating the hidden cost of “free” bags in higher prices.
- Create green jobs by giving the county valuable funds for community investments such as neighborhood greening, stormwater improvements, and litter cleanup.
- Distribute thousands of **free reusable bags to those in need.**

How can your students help?

- **Students can send a letter, call, or email their delegates and senators and urge them to support the bill. It is important to find out the name of the bill before you get started, for help please contact us. To find your elected officials, visit www.congress.org/congressorg/dbq/officials.** There may be opportunities to meet with legislators or testify if students are interested. Please contact us directly to discuss that option.
- Below are two sample letters to help your students prepare a letter to send. Students are encouraged to use the samples as a guide when writing their own.
- We also have included additional plastic bag facts. Facts from the fact sheet have been underlined in the sample letters to illustrate how they can be used.

Litter and Plastic Bag Facts

*Below are facts that will help you to make your case in your letter. But the best facts are stories from your own experiences in your community. **Be sure to share those stories too!***

Plastic bags are harmful and negatively impact our quality of life.

- The United States uses about 100 billion plastic bags a year.
- The bags produced are made with 12 million barrels of dirty oil (fossil fuels).
- Many plastic bags are littering our streams, parks, and streets which leads to the decline of our communities.
- Lower income communities generally have more litter, where plastic bags are often the item most littered.

Plastic bags cost consumers and businesses alike.

- Plastic bags cost grocery stores thousands of dollars a year.
- Consumers pay over \$4 billion each year for bags through increased retail prices.
- The average consumer pays up to \$37.50 every year in hidden bag costs.
- Reusable bags only cost \$1-\$3 and last about two years or more.

5 cent fee vs. a ban on disposable bags

- 5 cents is the average cost of plastic and paper disposable bags and the fee makes the cost known to the consumer
- Bans do not give consumers a chance, but a fee allows freedom
- If you don't want to pay the bag fee, RETHINK and use a reusable bag!

How has the bag fee worked in D.C.?

- 78% of businesses report positive/ neutral experience with the fee
- 75% of residents have reduced disposable bag use
- The fee helped raise \$3.5 million in two years, which supports green jobs and the restoration of the Anacostia River.

The 5 cent fee is a win for ALL

- Retailers will save millions of dollars in reduced bag purchase costs
- Low-income residents will receive free reusable bags
- The money generated from the fee will help support environmental restoration projects

Additional Resources

- Results from 2012 Potomac River Watershed Cleanup- www.potomaccleanup.org
- Why do we care about litter? – <http://fergusonfoundation.org/trash-free-potomac-watershed-initiative/information-about-littering/>
- Other Litter Reduction Policies in Maryland- www.trashfreemaryland.org

PERSUASIVE ELECTED OFFICIAL LETTER Sample # 1

TITLE AND NAME of ELECTED OFFICIAL
ADDRESS

Dear **INSERT TITLE AND NAME OF ELECTED OFFICIAL,**

THE FIRST PARAGRAPH SHOULD CLEARLY EXPLAIN:

- The legislation that you are for or against
- Who you are and how does the legislation impact you?
- What actions would you like for your representative to take?
- How can the legislation improve your community or a local situation?

Recently, I have learned that the **YOUR STATE** delegates and senators have proposed legislation which would allow **DESCRIBE THE BILL, LIST BILL NUMBER AND NAME**. As a student and resident of **YOUR COUNTY**, I support this legislation and ask that you consider voting in favor of this bill. This bill has the power to decrease **YOUR STATE** contribution to the 100 billion plastic bags Americans use annually. This bill can also help us decrease the amount of plastic bags in our parks, streams, and on our streets, which can improve the quality of life in our communities.

THE SECOND AND THIRD PARAGRAPHS SHOULD MAKE YOUR LETTER PERSONAL:

- Now that you have taken a position, cite your position and explain your reasoning.
- Use facts from the fact sheet to cite your position.
- Explaining your reasoning by telling your representative how the legislation will impact you, your school, your community, your family, etc.
- Use examples of how you can help or how your representative can help you

Plastic bags are very harmful to the environment and are very costly. Plastic bags are costing retailers over \$4 billion dollars per year. These costs will more than likely be added to the costs of products, where on average Maryland residents will spend \$37.50 a year on hidden bag fees. This legislation will allow us the freedom to rethink our habits and purchase reusable bags which only cost \$1-\$3. In the District of Columbia for example, 75% of residents decreased their plastic bag usage due to the passage of the bag fee. The more reusable bags we use the less plastic bags that will end up in the environment.

Even though my county spends tax dollars on cleaning up litter, there is still a lot of trash in my neighborhood, especially plastic bags. We can decrease the number of plastic bags used by consumers by supporting this bill and promoting more reusable bag giveaway drives, which will help residents to reduce their use of plastic bags. Your office can also support more community cleanups and school yard cleanups, which are less costly than larger efforts.

THE FINAL PARAGRAPH SHOULD RESTATE WHAT YOU WANT FROM YOUR REPRESENTATIVE:

- Conclude your letter by asking your representative to support your position
- Summarize your letter by stating your purpose for writing

Please consider voting in favor of this legislation. The bag fee will help improve the environment and quality of communities in **YOUR STATE OR COUNTY**. This bag fee is a simple solution to a big problem.

Sincerely,

INSERT Your Name and school name

PERSUASIVE ELECTED OFFICIAL LETTER SAMPLE # 2

Dear **INSERT TITLE AND NAME OF ELECTED OFFICIAL,**

Since **INSERT DATE YOU STARTED YOUR INVESTIGATION,** I have been investigating my community and learning a lot of new things about what is good and what needs improving in my neighborhood.

USE THIS SECTION TO:

- Provide your representative with good features about your community
- Things that can benefit or support the passage of the bag fee

Some of the good things are:

1. The construction on a new shopping center in my neighborhood is almost complete, there are nice stores and gives my friends and me a new place to hang out on the weekends.
2. Many of my neighbors have increased the amount of waste they recycle and have even begun to increase their use of reusable bags.
3. There are many activities taken place in my community where I can both work to fulfill my service learning hours and graduation requirements, while at the same time working to keep my community clean.

USE THIS SECTION TO:

- Provide your representative with the not-so-good features about your community
- Things that can persuade them to support the passage of the bag fee
- Use facts from the fact sheet

Some of the things I would like to see improve are:

1. There is a great deal of trash in the community park and the stream that flows behind it. The main source of trash is plastic bags.
2. The price of groceries is always increasing. Retailers are spending thousands of dollars on plastic and paper bags each year. These costs are often paid for by consumers and as a result my family has to cut back on entertainment.

USE THIS SECTION TO:

- Provide your representative with ways that you can help solve the problem.
- Ways your community help you with this problem
- The solution should not be too complex or demanding

Here are some ideas I have about making them better:

1. Set an example by not littering and helping other to reduce waste.
2. Support more efforts to pass out reusable bags to residents.
3. Support more community and school related efforts that help students receive service learning hours, while also working to help keep places in their communities clean.

You can help me by voting in favor of the **LIST THE BILL NUMBER AND NAME.**
STATE YOUR FAVORITE TWO REASONS WHY WE NEED A BAG FEE.

Thank you for taking the time to read my letter. I look forward to hearing back from you.

Sincerely,

Your Name and School Name