August 12, 2020

The Honorable JB Pritzker
Governor of Illinois
Office of the Governor
2017 State House
Springfield IL 62706

RE: Reusable bags – request to lift restrictions and provide clarity/guidance to retailers

Dear Governor Pritzker,

On behalf of the Illinois Recycling Association and its 100 members, thank you for your leadership throughout this challenging year. Your reliance on science and data, coupled with your transparent communications with citizens, has saved lives and prevented harms to communities large and small across the state.

We share your dependence on data and, as such, we respectfully request the following changes to your next Executive Order issued in response to the pandemic: 1.) Remove the ban on reusable bags, and 2.) Direct the IL Department of Public Health to provide guidance to retailers that encourages and clarifies safe use of reusable bags.

1.) Remove the ban on reusable bags.
Since the start of the pandemic there have been concerns that using reusable containers and bags at grocery stores and cafes could enhance the spread of the virus. Such claims, however, are not supported by evidence. Currently your Executive Order 2020-43 cites a mandate, found in Section 3(b), that directs retailers to “discontinue use of reusable bags.” While we value the measures that you and your administration have taken to prioritize public health during a still-evolving global pandemic, we submit the following:

- Data from lab studies on COVID-19 confirms that the primary mode of virus transmission¹ is person-to-person contact. Currently no evidence exists of virus transmission from surfaces.

- In June, a group of more than 115 epidemiologists, virologists, doctors and other health experts from 18 countries issued a joint statement² making it clear that single-use items are not inherently safer than reusables. These experts point to the growing evidence around virus transmission: COVID-19 spreads primarily via respiratory droplets rather than contact with surfaces. Transmission of novel coronavirus to persons from surfaces contaminated with the virus has not been documented.³

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2.) Direct the IL Department of Public Health to provide guidance to retailers that encourages and clarifies safe use of reusable bags.

Like Illinois, many other states and cities suspended temporarily their single use bag laws in early Spring as "cautionary measures." As of today, based on guidance from the CDC and local public health departments, many of those same cities and states have begun to reinstate those laws, citing the bigger, long-term threats posed by plastic pollution. Examples:

- The City of Boulder, Colorado’s public health department relied on the US Food & Drug Administration’s guidelines to support the reinstatement of their carryout bag ordinance.

- Vermont’s Agency of Natural Resources and Department of Environmental Conservation saw no need to change or postpone the ban on plastic bags, saying reusable bags can be used safely and are not any more of a risk than other surfaces customers and employees touch in retail transactions.

- As the world remains in pandemic-mode, the state health departments cited above have encouraged temporary alternative practices, such as customers bagging their own items. Such practices can reduce person-to-person contact (primary mode of virus transmission) between workers and customers while also reducing concerns about workers touching customers’ purchased items or reusable bags. Such practices also have the added benefit of reducing preventable single-use waste.

In both words and actions, you have continued to support essential pollution prevention and waste management policies and practices while simultaneously leading Illinois’ multi-faceted pandemic response activities. As a diverse coalition focused on reducing the harms that single-use waste has on our economy, environment and human health, we value your commitment on this front. It is because of your leadership that Illinois is a national model, demonstrating how reductions in infections can be achieved simultaneously with reductions in pollution and waste.

Clearly, we do not live in a one-problem-at-a-time world. The challenges of our day require a multi-solving mindset, a signature trait of your leadership and administration thus far. Reducing single-use waste remains an achievable, multi-benefit goal that people around the world are tackling, from global non-profits to governments at all levels — municipal, state, and countrywide. Multinational corporations are increasingly seeing themselves as part of the solutions as well, taking unprecedented steps to change their own business models and practices.

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7 [https://bouldercolorado.gov/newsroom/disposable-bag-fee-to-be-reinstated-on-july-1](https://bouldercolorado.gov/newsroom/disposable-bag-fee-to-be-reinstated-on-july-1)
10 [https://www.uschamberfoundation.org/blog/post/companies-working-reduce-single-use-plastics](https://www.uschamberfoundation.org/blog/post/companies-working-reduce-single-use-plastics)
While we are living through these cautionary times together, there remain practical ways to accomplish multiple objectives at once: steward and sustain finite natural resources, grow a restorative and equitable economy and ensure healthy, livable communities. Encouraging the safe and mainstream use of reusables is one specific and powerful way to achieve multiple benefits for consumers, businesses and entire communities across Illinois.

Thank you, in advance, for your consideration of this request.

Sincerely,

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