



April 2, 2019

The Honorable Ken Helm Chair, House Committee on Energy and Environment
900 Court St. NE
Salem OR 97301

RE: Opposition to regressive paper bag fee

Dear Chair Salinas and members of the House Committee on Energy and Environment,

Madam Chair and members of the committee, the Oregon Native American Chamber (ONAC) is dedicated to working with all members of the community to advance the economic and educational opportunities for Native Americans in Oregon and SW Washington. In pursuit of our mission, our board of directors, a diverse group of leaders from across Oregon, is tasked with evaluating and discussing legislation that may have impacts or implications for our members as well as the broader Native American community.

Recently, Oregon House Bill 2509 has come to our attention. While ONAC supports a bill that would ban single-use plastic bags at retailers and grocers throughout Oregon, in efforts toward environmental stewardship and the collective responsibility of the protection of our natural resources, we are deeply concerned with the provision of this bill that would enact a regressive tax on all Oregonians for using paper bags – which are already available at no cost in Portland.

The Portland Native American community is the 9th largest Native American community in the country representing over 380 distinct tribal nations from across North America. For over 25 years ONAC has worked in partnership with the community to create greater economic opportunity. While we've had several success stories, we also acknowledge the unfortunate reality that too many families in our Native community are just barely getting by. Many in our community are already stretching budgets to the penny given the growing cost of living in Portland. This bag fee is no minor thing for them.

ONAC wants our legislators to know that it is not equitable or responsible to implement a regressive paper bag tax that will negatively impact low-income families, working families, as well as elders and retirees that are living on a fixed and limited income. The proposed bag tax does not go towards furthering conservation goals or any stated public good. It simply goes to big grocery chains who are already giving away paper bags at no cost in Portland. Oregonians should not be forced to subsidize grocery store profits particularly when grocers just spent millions of dollars in a failed ballot campaign telling us how grocery taxes hurt Oregon families.

This bag tax could provide an additional revenue stream for grocery chains at our expense. A report about a similar bill in California proves this. The California Bill specifies that stores must provide a reusable grocery bag or recycled paper bag at no cost to customers paying via social assistance programs. Some stores have interpreted this provision to require that only a single bag be offered at no charge, resulting in working families, that should be exempt from California's bag tax, are still paying.



ONAC

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Additionally, California is also already advocating **raising** the tax for paper bags to maybe as much as 25 cents per bag. Would Oregon follow suit soon after the bill is passed? Again, there is no cap to how much retailers can charge for paper bags, and with profits going directly into the pockets of the grocers setting the price, it is a reality that bag taxes could soon cost families multiple dollars with each visit to the store.

As an organization that has been rooted in Oregon's Native communities for the past 25 years, we have traditionally been left out of these policy conversations. It is our obligation to our members and the Native community to voice our concerns and we want to be clear that we do not want to bear the burden of a regressive bag tax that only stands to benefit big business for something they give away, at no cost, today. HB 2509 should pass, but it should pass without a paper bag tax that will hurt many in our community as well as families across Oregon.

Respectfully,

James Parker, Director
Oregon Native American Chamber

Cc: ONAC Board of Directors