



TO: Chair Sollman, Vice-Chair Findley, and Committee Members
FR: Alyssa Rueda, Environmental Justice Projects Assistant, Beyond Toxics
Meet Panchal, Statewide Environmental Justice Project Manager, Beyond Toxics
DT: February 14, 2023

RE: Testimony to the Senate Committee on Energy & Environment in Support of SB 545

Dear Chair Sollman, Vice-Chair Findley, and Committee Members,

On behalf of Beyond Toxics, a state-wide environmental justice nonprofit, and thousands of our supporters across the state, we are writing to express our strong support of SB 545—a bill that will update Oregon’s health code to allow customers to bring reusables and refillable containers for food in food establishments. Beyond Toxics has been an active public interest participant in policy decisions related to public well-being for over twenty years, and our organization emphasizes environmental justice and community engagement. Passing SB 545 is a necessary step in prioritizing human health by reducing the amount of single-use containers entering our landfills and contaminating our environment.

The increased waste production related to PPE, accompanied by the increased use and disposal of other single-used- plastics (SUP). Safety concerns related to shopping in supermarkets during COVID-19 led to a preference of consumers and providers for fresh-food packaged in plastic containers (to avoid food contamination and to extend shelf-life), and for the use of single-use food packaging and plastic bags to carry groceries. ¹ Now, single-use products like take-out containers are having a huge environmental impact, not just in our overflowing landfills but also in our parks, our streets, and our homes. In recent years, there has been a shift to preferring reusable and refillable containers for their economic and environmental benefits; however, the laws are still behind the times. Passing SB 545 will allow reusables and refillables in food establishments, which aligns with the people’s agenda and future goals.

In the timeline of trying to address the issue of single-use containers, we have shifted from one material to the next with the idea that they will be more “environmentally friendly.” However, there are still environmental and health issues with all single-use containers. Part of the issue with single-use containers is the materials that they are made out of, but a greater issue is the fact that the single-use containers are only used once or a few times then thrown away. This broken

¹ Increased use and demand of single-use-plastics - [Increased plastic pollution due to COVID-19 pandemic: Challenges and recommendations - ScienceDirect](#)

cycle requires endless production and contributes to exponential amounts of waste. Production of single-use containers itself is linked to ground degradation through the extraction of fossil fuels and raw materials, air pollution through the burning of fossil fuels and other chemicals, and water pollution through run-off and groundwater seepage. Plastic products are transported and distributed through modes of fossil fuel reliant transportation. Then, after being used once or twice, the plastic packaging and food ware are transported once again to an incinerator or our overflowing landfills where they remain for hundreds of years. There, the products produce air toxics. This cycle continues every time a person enters a food establishment.

Oregon can be amongst the leaders in this societal shift towards reusable and refillable containers in food establishments. Instead of continuing a wasteful cycle of one-time use, we can implement a cycle of long-term use. This is a necessary step in a much larger goal of establishing healthier practices to reduce waste from entering our environment. We would also like to applaud the Oregon Department of Agriculture for committing to taking steps toward rulemaking to address this issue. We strongly urge the Oregon Health Authority to follow suit in the interest of human health and waste reduction.

Beyond Toxics strongly urges the Senate Committee on Energy & Environment to support SB 545 and take necessary action to protect Oregonians from continued exposure to harmful substances.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Alyssa Rueda
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