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April 3, 2023

RE: Written Testimony for Senate Bill 545

Dear Representative Marsh and the Committee on Energy and Environment,

We are writing today on behalf of Waste-Free Advocates, a 501(c)(3) organization that is dedicated to encouraging Oregonians to create a sustainable future by empowering and connecting communities to minimize over-consumption and waste. We are writing today in strong support of Senate Bill 545. Plastic pollution is one of the major issues of our time, and it is imperative that we take strong, decisive action to curtail the use of single-use plastic.

Forty percent of the plastic that is created today is for single-use. Only about 9% of plastic ever produced has been recycled and 12% has been burned. This has led to a massive waste problem with the remaining 79% of plastic ending up in the landfill or the environment. The truth is that recycling can never completely address this plastic pollution problem. The only real viable option is reduction.

Reuse culture was a part of the fabric of our society before the invention of single-use products. Refilling was the standard, but as single-use products were marketed more widely, the food safety codes were written to disallow an important form of reuse - allowing consumers to bring their own containers to stores and restaurants. Oversight agencies have threatened food purveyors with loss of vending license if they handle a customer's own food container. This puts businesses that want to do the right thing for the environment in a tough situation. If SB 545 passes it will give business owners the freedom to decide for themselves whether or not to allow customers to bring their own container. It will allow small businesses to cut the costs associated with the purchase of single use containers, most of which contain plastic, in favor of the more economical and environmentally friendly option of reuse.

Environmental groups have recommended reducing and reusing since the 1970s. However, this is just not happening on a large enough scale and can not happen on a large enough scale unless stores and restaurants are allowed to refill containers.

This legislation is not unprecedented. Other countries and other states have passed similar rules that support a business' right to choose to refill, and the efforts have been successful at reducing waste. Additionally, no foodborne illnesses have been linked to reusable containers. We trust these businesses to safely handle our food; let's trust them to safely handle reusable containers too.

Thank you for the opportunity to share our views and our support for Senate Bill 545. We urge the committee to support this bill to help to stem the massive tide of single use plastic pollution that places a huge financial and environmental burden on local communities throughout their lifecycle.

Sincerely,

Waste-Free Advocates Board of Directors and our member coalition of environmental advocates

Julia Bonnheim, Resource Director

Brittney Wendell, Board President

Tara Knierim, Board Vice President

Haley Robinson, Board Treasurer

Jessica Zahn, Board Secretary

Michael Freudenthal, Board Member At-Large

Alaina Labak, Board Member At-Large

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