

MAXINE E. DEXTER, MD
STATE REPRESENTATIVE

DISTRICT 33



HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

To: Members of the House Committee on Climate, Energy, and Environment

Date: April 5, 2023

Subject: Support SB 545.

Chair Marsh, Vice Chairs Levy and Levy, and members of the committee:

For the record, my name is Dr. Maxine Dexter and I am honored to be the State Representative for House District 33, which includes NW & Downtown Portland, Linnton, and Cathedral Park. I respectfully submit this testimony in support of SB 545, which will direct the Oregon Health Authority to adopt rules that will make way for restaurants to allow consumers to fill a consumer-owned container with food.

Recent years have marked a rise in awareness about plastic pollution and its detrimental impact on our environment. The United States generates 42 million metric tons of plastic waste each year¹, and most ends up in our oceans or landfills, where it may take 500 years or more to break down. Plastic waste contaminates all major ecosystems on the planet, with concern increasing about its potential impacts on wildlife and human health as smaller and more widespread plastic particles are identified in both the natural and built environment. Plastic clogs up our waterways, floats along the ocean's surface, kills marine life, and is even found in human tissue. New research has also shown that when exposed to solar radiation, plastic releases methane and ethylene, especially as it degrades².

Seventy-nine percent of the world's plastic is not recycled³. In 2018, 9 percent of recycled plastic was threatened as China banned the import of most plastics and other materials that it used to accept for recycling due to trash contamination issues⁴. Most of that previously recycled plastic is now being landfilled or incinerated⁵. Since then, Oregonians have thrown away more than 16,000 tons of previously recyclable items, much of them single-use plastics like take-out containers.

This bill is not a mandate for restaurants to accept reusable food containers but allows them to meet consumer demand to shift away from single-use plastic. This bill does not require restaurants to limit the use of disposable containers if they opt to accept consumer containers. Ultimately, SB 545 is about choice for consumers and businesses.

¹ <https://nap.nationalacademies.org/read/26132/chapter/2>

² <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC6070199/>

³ <https://advances.sciencemag.org/content/3/7/e1700782>

⁴ https://www.wto.org/english/news_e/news17_e/impl_03oct17_e.htm

⁵ <https://www.theatlantic.com/technology/archive/2019/03/china-has-stopped-accepting-our-trash/584131/>

My thanks to Senators Sollman and Dembrow for their work on this legislation, as well as the numerous advocates and organizations who have been pushing this body to act for years. Every Oregonian should expect that their government will do all it can to maintain the health of their state and our environment and I am grateful for the opportunity to fulfill this expectation with my strong support for legislation like SB 545. I hope you will join me with your support.

Respectfully submitted,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Maxine Dexter', written in a cursive style.

Representative Maxine Dexter, M.D.
House District 33 (NW & Downtown Portland, Linnton, & Cathedral Park)