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April 11, 2023

RE: SUPPORT for Senate Bill 543A

Dear Chair March, Vice-Chair Levy, Vice-Chair Levy, and Members of the Committee,

I am writing to express our strong support for Senate Bill 543A, to phase-out one of the most harmful single-use plastics contributing to our plastic pollution crisis: foam foodware.

Every year, 11 million metric tons of plastics enter our ocean from land-based sources alone, much of which are single-use plastics, designed to be used once and then immediately discarded.[1] While the ocean is the epicenter of the plastic pollution crisis, the impacts of plastic production, use, and pollution are extensive. Plastics have been found in the deepest part of the ocean, on the tallest peaks in our national parks, and in our own bodies. In addition, plastics contribute to the climate crisis. By 2030, greenhouse gas emissions from plastic production are expected to reach 1.3 billion tons, equivalent to 300 coal-fired power plants.[2] We can't solve our global climate crisis without addressing the plastic loophole.

In the over 35 years Ocean Conservancy has led the International Coastal Cleanup® (ICC), more than 115,000 volunteers have removed over 1.4 million pounds of debris in Oregon alone. One of the most insidious forms of plastic pollution is foam foodware, also known as expanded polystyrene (EPS). EPS is made by trapping tiny air bubbles inside plastic, resulting in a material that is about 95% air by volume. While this makes EPS lightweight and readily transportable, these same qualities also mean that foam is easily carried in the wind and dispersed as a pollutant, where it breaks up into thousands of microplastics. In the U.S., 35 years of ICC data show polystyrene foam items collectively ranks as the #8 most commonly collected type of trash from our beaches and waterways. Foam is among the most common microplastic pollutants collected in the ICC representing nearly half of all the "tiny trash" items collected over the last 10 years.[3]

Foam foodware is not economically feasible to recycle and does not meet the Associate of Plastic Recycler's design for recyclability standards.[4] Further, the U.S. Plastics Pact, a consortium of more than 100 businesses, government bodies, and non-profits included polystyrene on the list of problematic and unnecessary packaging to be eliminated by 2025.[5] This shows that even members of the industry recognize that there is no way for this material to be part of the circular economy.

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[1] Borrelle, S.B., et al. (2020). Predicted growth in plastic waste exceeds efforts to mitigate plastic pollution. *Science*.
[2] CIEL. (2019) "Plastics and Climate."
[3] International Coastal Cleanup®, Cleanup Reports.
[4] APR Design® Guide
[5] Ocean Conservancy, The U.S. Plastics Pact List of Problematic Items to be Eliminated

Oregon has been a leader with the passage of the Recycling Modernization Act in 2021, one of the first extended producer responsibility policies for packaging in the country. However, the science is clear – to address our plastic pollution crisis we must do more, and that starts with reducing the amount of plastics we make and use.

Research coauthored by Ocean Conservancy and published in *Science* found that to reduce ocean plastic pollution to 2015 levels, we need to reduce plastic production by 25 – 40%, in addition to increasing circularity in waste management and targeted cleanups.[1] Tackling single-use plastic packaging and foodware must central to any strategy to address our plastic pollution crisis because it is these items that are the most likely to end up polluting our beaches and waterways.

We need to eliminate the most harmful and unnecessary plastics that are leading to outsized pollution impacts – starting with expanded polystyrene foodware. SB 543A would follow the precedent set by nine states and Washington, D.C. that have already passed legislation to ban or phase out foam foodware.

For the sake of our communities, our ocean, and our climate, we must take immediate action to address plastic pollution, which is why I strongly urge your support of SB 543A.

Sincerely,

Anja Brandon, Ph.D.
Associate Director, U.S. Plastics Policy
Ocean Conservancy