Senator Michael Dembrow, Chair
Senate Committee on Environment and Natural Resources
Oregon Legislature

RE: Environment Oregon supports House Bill 2883

Chair Dembrow and Members of the Committee,

Environment Oregon is a statewide, citizen-based environmental advocacy organization working for clean air, clean water and open space. We support House Bill 2883 because we believe that nothing we use for ten minutes should pollute the environment for hundreds of years.

Our country and world's addiction to plastic is a growing problem, responsible for country-sized swirling gyres of plastic waste in our oceans and growing landfills in our country's interior. This pollution is damaging our ecosystems and endangering public health. Everyday, people throw away millions of disposable plastic items, including polystyrene cups and containers. Polystyrene foam, commonly referred to as Styrofoam, is among the worst forms of plastic pollution. Like all plastics, it does not biodegrade but breaks down into smaller and smaller pieces, which means every bit of polystyrene ever made is still out there. Often, these pieces are swept into our waterways, ending up in our oceans and lakes. Scientists have found plastic fragments in hundreds of species, including 86% of sea turtle species and nearly half of all seabird and marine mammal species, and ingesting these fragments is often fatal. This plastic will continue to pollute our water and threaten wildlife for centuries to come.

Nothing we use for a few minutes should be allowed to pollute our planet for hundreds of years, especially when we don't really need it. Fortunately, there is a simple solution to help solve this problem: banning the use of polystyrene takeout containers and cups.

Why polystyrene? There are a few reasons. First of all, polystyrene is one of the most prevalent forms of single-use plastic pollution, both in Oregon and across the country. The Ocean Conservancy consistently ranks polystyrene foam containers among the top 10 most commonly found forms of beach trash in the International Coastal Cleanup[1]. Polystyrene foam is lightweight and breaks apart easily, contributing to its dispersal. For example, the volunteers of the International Coastal Cleanup

[1] https://oceanconservancy.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/07/Building-A-Clean-Swell.pdf

found over 2 million pieces of plastic foam on one day in 2017[1]. Unfortunately, polystyrene's tendency to break apart doesn't mean that it goes away. Like other plastics, it takes hundreds of years for polystyrene to biodegrade, if it does at all [2] [3].

To make matters worse, polystyrene is difficult to recycle, due to many of the same reasons that make it attractive as a material. Polystyrene foam is mostly made up of air, meaning that it has a low weight-to-volume ratio and thus needs to be processed in large quantities to be profitable. Transporting low-density polystyrene waste to a central facility and cleaning the foam recovered to remove contamination that can derail the recycling process increases the cost and time required for polystyrene recycling[4] [5]. As a result, only around 2% of the polystyrene produced in the United States every year is actually recycled[6]. The rest either enters landfills or the natural environment, contributing to the plastic pollution that has become impossible to ignore.

Oregon is fortunate to have a polystyrene recycling facility in Tigard, Agilyx, and their efforts to help establish a circular economy for plastics are commendable. However, the plain fact of the matter is that we won't be able to recycle ourselves out of this problem. Globally, only 9% of the plastic ever created in the world has ever been recycled[7]. Polystyrene foam isn't accepted in Oregon's curbside recycling, and overall statewide recycling rates have been falling in recent years[8]. Efforts to educate Oregonians about the impact of littering and strengthen the state's recycling system are undoubtedly a crucial part of solving this problem, but the only way to truly stop plastic pollution is by turning the plastic tap off and deciding that we won't use the most egregious single-use plastics anymore. The waste hierarchy of reduce, reuse, recycle is in that order for a reason; the most effective way to reduce plastic pollution is by using less plastic in the first place.

Banning polystyrene takeout containers is far from a novel idea, and cities and companies across the United States have decided to ban these containers or phase out their use. Here in Oregon, the cities of Florence, Silverton, Medford, Milwaukie and Portland have passed polystyrene bans, with Eugene moving forward with an ordinance to restrict polystyrene foam and other single-use plastics this spring. In fact, Portland's ban on polystyrene has been in place for 30 years. New York City's polystyrene ban went into effect on January 1st of this year, and other cities including Miami Beach, Seattle, and San Francisco have moved to restrict the use of polystyrene in the years since. The state of

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[2] https://www.researchgate.net/publication/318854130_An_overview_on_biodegradation_of_polystyrene_and_modified_polystyrene_the_microbial_approach

[3] https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC2769161/

[4] https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC4000729/#R9

[5] https://cen.acs.org/environment/pollution/Chemistry-solutions-plastic-trash-problem/96/i25

[6] https://www.epa.gov/sites/production/files/2018-07/documents/smm_2015_tables_and_figures_07252018_fnl_508_0.pdf

[7] https://news.nationalgeographic.com/2017/07/plastic-produced-recycling-waste-ocean-trash-debris-environment/

[8] https://pamplinmedia.com/pt/9-news/412291-313082-happy-america-recycles-day-oregon-but-youre-failing-to-meet-state-goals-

Maine recently became the first state in the country to ban the use of polystyrene, and both chambers of Maryland's legislature have likewise passed a bill banning foam cups and takeout containers.

The results of these bans have been encouraging: San Francisco registered a 36% decrease in the prevalence of polystyrene foam litter after their ordinance was passed[9]. In addition, none of the over 3000 businesses that transitioned away from polystyrene containers in San Francisco applied for a hardship waiver, and restaurants in other cities have found that the costs of alternatives decreased and became more readily available after polystyrene was banned[10]. Oregon has the chance to become the first state on the West Coast to ban polystyrene foam takeout containers and cups and become a national leader on plastic pollution.

At Environment Oregon, we have been talking to Oregonians about this issue at their doors since May of last year, and the reaction has been clear. We've talked to over 90,000 Oregonians and close to 40,000 signed a petition or took other actions in support of this bill. This strong support is consistent no matter where we are in the state.

55 restaurants and businesses in Portland and Eugene have signed on to support our campaign, along with over a dozen environmental organizations. Both of these letters of support have been submitted into the written record for your review. In addition, we've collected over 500 photo petitions from Oregonians who want to see the state be a leader on plastic pollution.

For many Oregonians, polystyrene takeout containers already feel like a thing of the past. We know the costs of plastic pollution, and the first step in dealing with this problem is preventing pollution in the first place by banning single-use polystyrene takeout containers. Oregonians have raised their voices and made it clear that they want the state to be a leader on plastic pollution and take real action to protect our precious rivers, coasts, natural areas and wildlife.

Environment Oregon urges you to pass House Bill 2883 and make Oregon a national leader in preventing plastic pollution and protecting wildlife.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony on this important issue.

Sincerely,
John Ammondson
Fellow, Environment Oregon

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[9]https://www.waterboards.ca.gov/sanfranciscobay/water_issues/programs/stormwater/MRP/02-2012/Comments/Dart/Staff_Exhibits.pdf
[10]https://www.cleanwater.org/files/publications/ca/cwa_fact_sheet_polystyrene_litter_2011_03.pdf