



May 22, 2019

Senate Committee on Rules
900 Court St. NE,
Salem, OR 97301

Dear Chair Burdick and Members of the Committee;

The Oregon Consumer League (OCL) has worked to protect consumers' rights for over 50 years. We work to educate consumers, to promote fair and ethical business practices, and to advance consumer protection laws in the Oregon Legislature.

We are concerned that the paper bag fee portion of House Bill 2509 will hurt Oregon consumers while doing nothing to further the admirable goal of addressing plastic pollution via the prohibition of single use plastic bags. We support HB 2509. We do not support the paper bag fee.

Regressive taxes, particularly grocery taxes, hurt Oregon consumers. Grocers have made this point repeatedly in their attempts to pass Measure 103. It seems strange to us that Oregon consumers should be asked to pay for the cost of this bill.

While the paper bag fee may be dismissed by some as insignificant, for consumers struggling to make ends meet, any additional cost at the check-out line can be deeply felt. While this bill has protections for those on social assistance programs, it is also worth noting that many people on fixed incomes, including many seniors, do not qualify for those programs. Our concern is that that the increased costs at each shopping trip will hurt these Oregonians and OCL's question is, why?

To what end is this paper bag fee attached to this bill? What does a paper bag fee have to do with banning plastic if not for the concerns of grocery corporations? Upon what are those concerns founded? Grocers in Portland have offered paper bag fees free of charge since that city's plastic ban went into effect and their doors remain open. There is nothing keeping grocers from assessing their own fee if they so choose. Why are they asking the government to step in and mandate that Oregon consumers funnel their dollars into their coffers? It seems strange that the Legislature would consider putting corporate grocer concerns over the welfare of Oregon consumers.

HB 2509 is a good bill with a consumer-punishing portion in the form of a paper bag fee that should be removed. OCL stands ready to give full-throated support to HB 2509 if the paper bag fee is addressed.

Thank you for your consideration,

Steve Weiss

Board President - Oregon Consumer League