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February 14, 2023

Senator Janeen Sollman, Chair  
Senate Committee on Energy and Environment

**RE: Support for three Plastics Bills**  
**SB 543 - Phasing out polystyrene**  
**SB 544 - Reducing plastic at the source**  
**SB 545 - Legalizes reusables**

Chair Sollman and Members of the Committee,

For the record, my name is Travis Williams. I am the Executive Director of the non-profit organization Willamette Riverkeeper.

Since 1996, Willamette Riverkeeper has proudly served as the eyes, ears, and voice of the Willamette River. We believe that a river with excellent water quality and abundant habitat that is safe for fishing and recreation is a basic public right.

One of Willamette Riverkeeper's key public engagement programs up and down the river is "Trashy Tuesday" and "Trashy Thursday." These monthly cleanup events engage hundreds of volunteers each year to help clean up our river. We have included photos of some of the trash that our volunteers have pulled from the Willamette River during these efforts.

Today, Willamette Riverkeeper is submitting testimony **in Support of three consumer packaging bills: SB 543, SB 544 and SB 545** - bills which phase out polystyrene, reduce single-use plastics, and revise our health code to allow reusable consumer packaging to reduce the use of consumer plastics. I thank Senator Sollman for scheduling these important bills for hearing and, hopefully, a work session.

When we think of the global problem of single-use plastics, we think of the Great Pacific Garbage Patch. But in the Willamette River, our volunteers clean up countless volumes of plastic trash each year. There are many long-term, damaging, and far-reaching health and ecological effects of these misplaced plastics, including ingestion by birds and fish and absorption of plastic chemicals by wildlife and humans alike. Our use of plastics needs to be reduced. Replacing single-use plastics with serviceware which can be reused and eventually recycled at the end of their useful life is one key step in the right direction.

Polystyrene is one of the worst pollutants in our environment because it breaks down into several smaller pieces and is very difficult to separate from other organic and inorganic waste in our waterways. Made with 'forever chemicals,' these polystyrene particles are ingested by aquatic life

and work their way through the food chain, with trace elements being found in the human bloodstream. There are other less harmful alternatives to the use of polystyrene, providing better alternatives for consumer food packaging and other uses. A ban on polystyrene is warranted by good science and wise from an environmental stewardship perspective.

As many of us have transitioned to reusable stainless steel water bottles to cut back on plastic waste in our lives, so too, can we carry serviceware made of stainless steel, wood, and other non-plastic materials as a practical alternative to plastic single-use serviceware. We can reduce this source of plastic pollution and, through this legislation and conscientious personal choices, remove much of the plastic we find strewn along our waterways, roadsides, and beaches.

Passage of SB 543, SB 544, and SB 545 are important steps forward in controlling single-use plastics through plastic stewardship programs. We must make the commitment to reduce our use of single-use plastics. Producers and consumers should work together so that plastic containers, polystyrene, and plastic serviceware are not strewn through our land and waters for someone else to pick up or break into microplastics and ingested by all living creatures, including ourselves.

Just as the Oregon Bottle Bill helped clean up Oregon by creating incentives to recycle beverage cans, so will incentivizing Oregonians to use non-plastic serviceware. This will address the problem of single-use plastics and help reduce the stream of plastic waste which is found in the Willamette River, our oceans, landfills, and landscapes.

Single-use plastic serviceware is a serious local problem, contributing to the tons of waste materials that Willamette Riverkeeper removes from our river each year. Attached to my testimony are pictures of single-use plastic serviceware, plastic beverage bottles, and other plastic consumer products that our volunteers have pulled from the Willamette River as part of our ongoing cleanup and restoration efforts.

The amount of plastics we pull from the river is shocking and avoidable. SB 543, SB 544, and SB 545, as a suite of bills, will reduce plastics in our waterways, a good start to correct this serious problem.

Thank you, Chair Sollman, for your leadership in sponsoring and bringing forward these three important bills.

**I urge the members of the Committee to give SB 543, SB 544, and SB 545 a DO PASS recommendation.**

Sincerely,  
Travis Williams  
Riverkeeper and Executive Director  
[travis@willametteriverkeeper.org](mailto:travis@willametteriverkeeper.org)

*Attached: Pictures of single-use plastic waste removed from the Willamette River*





*Photo: Willamette River - Eugene area floodplain riddled with plastic trash*



*Photo: Willamette River - riverbank in Springfield, denigrated by piles of single-use plastic beverage containers*





*Photo: Willamette River - Eugene-Springfield River Guardians volunteers clear several yards of styrofoam and plastics during a local river cleanup*