

SB 543 Written Testimony in Favor- February 14, 2023

My name is Ryan Parker and I am Oregon's longest-serving Beach Ranger, having been in the position since 2011. No Oregonian has done the job longer than I have. I remove over 60,000 pounds of debris off the beach annually, much of it foam and plastic. These past 12 years have given me a first-hand view what ocean pollution means for our small coastal community of Newport, where I am an elected representative on the City Council. In short, plastic pollution of all stripes, included expanded polystyrene, is under reported and its environmental effects are many.

As the main Newport City Councilor to publicly champion common-sense environmental protections, I saw regulation of foam and plastic takeout containers as a measurable step to address the problem. Newport's plastic and foam reduction ordinance, passed in 2022, is the state's most restrictive ordinance to curtail the use of single-used products and it shows how a small city can stand up to this powerful and insidious lobby from the petrochemical industry. It could, with thoughtful review, be a way for a scaled, statewide version of SB 543 that can be sent for a floor vote.

As someone who plucks these items out of the environment, full time, including plastic-entangled marine mammals, I am really tired of industry excuses and monetization of a problem that is basically due to ignorance-those producing the problem are economically and spatially unaffected by it. For my constituents however, this is not the case. The ACC and other lobbyists are totally lowballing their impact that causes cancer for working people along the Gulf Coast, and in parts of Pennsylvania and Ohio, where more and more plastic manufacturing plants are being built.

Foam pollution is visible in all waters-estuaries, riverbanks and on ocean beaches. The product never biodegrades, and piled polystyrene resembles fish eggs. Settled science on the harms of plastics that are already in the aquatic food web. Foam and plastic pollution continue to get worse, and the industry continues to produce more single use consumer items. A moral sense of right and wrong is missing in state regulation of these products. For a city reliant upon the commercial fishing industry, we have to better protect the very waters that our and all of Oregon's economic lifeline.

Environmental marine pollution, along with roadside litter of takeout containers attracts nuisance wildlife, which then carryover harms endangered shorebird populations. Crows and Western gulls are particularly keen to peck at and spread littered EPS foam debris. When attracted by human litter, these birds then predate shorebird nests. So the state spends money to protect vulnerable wildlife, but on the other hand shrugs off millions of pounds of plastics dumped onto state rights of way, along public waterways and fails to fine polluters, and is surprised that salmonid species are near extinction?

This bill would go a long way towards much more sustainable food and consumer item packaging in Oregon. Make a statewide commitment to my kids' future and get this bill to a floor vote. At the bare minimum do that.

On Oregon's birthday, show leadership and pass SB 543 out of committee and show us you can help protect our near-shore environment, and make polluters pay an economic cost to the social harms their products cause. You have the power to better protect working families by eliminating a legacy and toxic source point. Thank you.

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