

February 16, 2023
Senate Committee on Energy and Environment
Oregon State Capitol
900 Court Street NE
Salem, OR 97301

RE: SB 543, SB544, 545 - Support

Chair Sollman, Vice-Chair Findley, and Members of the Committee,

I am writing on behalf of The Environmental Center in Bend, Oregon in support of:

- SB 543, a bill to eliminate expanded polystyrene foam within food vendors and take-out establishments;
- SB 544, a bill to establish program for source reduction of single-use plastic food ware and single-use packaging; and
- SB 545, a bill to adopt rules allowing consumers to use their own containers for refilling with food at food establishments and to adopt rules allowing food establishments to reuse take-home food containers returned to restaurants by consumers.

For over 30 years, The Environmental Center has worked to embed sustainability into daily life in Central Oregon through program areas related to energy, gardening/nutrition, and youth education, and waste. The Environmental Center's Rethink Waste Project (RWP) has its roots in community driven waste solutions as the recycling team in Bend decades ago. Today, the RWP conducts education and engagement activities throughout Deschutes County to first reduce waste, then recover as much as possible.

[According to the UNEP](#) "Of the seven billion tonnes of plastic waste generated globally so far, less than 10 per cent has been recycled. Millions of tonnes of plastic waste are lost to the environment, or sometimes shipped thousands of kilometers to destinations where it is mostly burned or dumped. The estimated annual loss in the value of plastic packaging waste during sorting and processing alone is US\$ 80- 120 billion." [As a member of the Recycling Modernization Act Rulemaking Advisory Committee, I've also learned](#) that responsible recycling options for expanded polystyrene are limited. Currently, only block white expanded polystyrene

is recommended for depot collection (with specific handling guidelines such as mechanical densification and indoor collections in order to achieve environmental benefits). Expanded polystyrene used in food serviceware is not currently on the collection list. The RMA takes significant steps towards recycling efficiency, but it does not go far enough to address the problem of materials that are simply not designed to be effectively recycled - not to mention the climate impacts of producing these fossil fuel based products in the first place.

We must set our communities up for success to reduce single-use waste and reuse materials, given the limitations of recycling. And we cannot rely on individual consumer actions alone, especially when consumers are not provided options for recyclable or reusable alternatives to expanded polystyrene, and other single-use plastic foodware and packaging, or single-use containers at food establishments. We must enact policies and systems that support waste reduction practices. SB 543, 544, and 545 will help Oregonians take meaningful steps to reduce waste.

The explosion of non-essential single use plastics has occurred only in the last few decades as producers pushed this unsustainable material into our communities. When producers opt for cheap single-use packaging and foodware, they are only passing on the cost of managing those materials to consumers. Here in Deschutes County, we can feel the impact of the buy-use-throw-away-buy-more model. For us, “away” is our local Knott Landfill, which is expected to be full by 2029. The County is in the process of identifying potential locations for a new landfill. Our communities have not always had a single-use plastics problem, and we can act now to reverse this trend.

We urge legislators to support SB 543, 544, and 545 to reduce environmental and social costs caused by single-use packaging and serviceware.

Sincerely,

Udara Abeysekera Bickett (she/her)
Rethink Waste Program Manager
The Environmental Center





16 NW Kansas Avenue • Bend, OR 97703

541.385.6908

www.envirocenter.org