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ACTION ALERT! Ask Massachusetts Legislators to Oppose a Tax on Paper Bags!

FOR MASSACHUSETTS RESIDENTS ONLY

Last week, the Massachusetts Senate passed their budget bill that includes language to tax paper bags.

Section 34 of the Senate Version of the FY17 Operating Budget includes a requirement that stores charge at least 10 cents for recycled paper bags in spite of it being a commodity that is highly recycled, recyclable, compostable and renewable. Paper is an environmental success story. In 2015, 66.8 percent of all paper consumed in the U.S. was recovered for recycling, and the recovery rate has met or exceeded 63 percent for the past seven years.

According to the Environmental Protection Agency, more paper (by weight) is recovered for recycling from municipal solid waste streams than glass, plastic and aluminum combined. In 2014, 96 percent of the U.S. population had access to community curbside and/or drop-off paper recycling services. Retailer choices in packaging materials are market-driven, determined by regulation, price, performance, and consumer preference. Some retailers have voluntarily transitioned to paper bags in response to consumer demands, even in the absence of legislation.

Imposing the fee on paper bags serves on legitimate public purpose and, in fact, has several unintended effects. Taxes and fees burden hard working citizens, increasing the cost of basic necessities for all citizens and disproportionately impacting those who are low-income. For low-income citizens who are dependent on public transit and cannot practically expect to bring reusable bags every time they go to a retailer, this will create an additional burden. These consumers cannot afford to pay an additional tax on bags while they struggle to cover the increasing cost of basic necessities, and need a free packaging option to protect their food purchases from damage and contamination.

Offering a paper bag free of charge at the point of purchase is a part of a retailer's customer service. There is no existing law prohibiting retailers from charging for paper bags voluntarily. Many services are included in the price of the goods consumers already buy, such as rent, electricity, insurance and employee wages. Once the government imposes an obligation for consumers to pay fees to the retailer for bags, those fees are likely to increase over time.

Members with facilities in Massachusetts! Please [click here](#) to ask the members of the Budget Conference Committee to reject Section 34 of the Senate Version of the FY17 Operating Budget.