

**Testimony
Plastics
September 15, 2020**

The League of Women Voters of Montgomery County urges the County Council to adopt two bills proposed to significantly reduce plastic pollution in Montgomery County – Bills 32-20 and 33-20.

For many years, the League has had a policy that can be summarized as “Reduce, Reuse, Recycle”. Now all over this country – and the world – we are learning that plastic pollution is a major issue. The production of single-use plastics is growing enormously, and many of these – and other plastics – are not recyclable.

Furthermore, many plastics supposedly sent for recycling are dumped in poor countries, and other plastics degrade into microplastics that are found in waterways, fish tissue, and people. If plastics are sent to incinerators, they contribute to greenhouse gases and toxic air pollution called dioxins.

Bill 32-20: Solid Waste - Waste Reduction/Source Reduction and Single-Use Straws

This bill will require that the county executive develop an ongoing waste reduction program that will reinforce the county's waste reduction hierarchy and policies. Ongoing waste reduction planning is important - recycling markets change regularly, and we learn more and more each year about how many problems our plastic waste causes.

- We support an amendment to require an annual report on progress on waste reduction goals and objectives.
- This bill will also ban petroleum-based plastic straws. Here is a reason that plant-based plastic straws are not really a good substitute: they only break down into compost if they are in an industrial composting facility, not in a natural environment or landfill.
- Thus, replacing petroleum-based plastic straws with plant-based plastic straws will have virtually no impact on reducing land or marine plastic pollution because they do not break down on land or in the ocean and behave very similarly to petroleum-based plastic straws.

Bill 33-20: Solid Waste - Food Service Products Packaging Materials – Requirements

This bill will expand Montgomery County's expanded polystyrene (foam) food container ban to include all #6 polystyrene food-ware. Even though Number 6 polystyrene products are stamped with

a recycling symbol, they are not recyclable at the county's Materials Recycling Facility (nor at most other recycling facilities in this country).

- Residents mistakenly believe that they are recyclable and toss them into blue bins, contaminating that recycling load. County staff has to manually remove these materials, and they are then sent to the incinerator in Dickerson.

Passing these two bills would help fulfill existing Montgomery County policy about moving beyond unrecyclable plastic.

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