

**Testimony on behalf of the County Executive Marc Elrich on Bill 32-20 - Solid Waste (Trash) - Waste Reduction/Source Reduction and Single-Use Straws - Requirements**

**September 15, 2020**

Good afternoon. My name is Adam Ortiz, Director of the Montgomery County Department of Environmental Protection.

Bill 32-20 is legislation that addresses two issues. The first issue is waste reduction, which is the top priority among our efforts to reach zero waste. First and foremost, we want to reduce the amount of waste created in Montgomery County.

Bill 32-20 sets the foundation of the County's ongoing waste reduction program, and also provides a more streamlined and efficient way to continue to expand our waste reduction initiatives and activities. This bill provides us the ability to adopt regulations to implement waste reduction requirements to reduce the amount of waste generated, prohibit the use and/or sale of specific items and materials that harm the environment, and to require the use and/or sale of environmentally preferable items instead.

Bill 32-20 also provides requirements to reduce the use of straws to prevent waste generation, and to require use of straws made from environmentally preferable materials when requested or needed.

Pertaining to straws, the intent of Bill 32-20 is:

- Food service businesses will provide straws only upon request by a customer.
- If a customer requests a straw, the straw provided cannot be plastic, and must instead be reusable, or made of a material that is compostable.
- We realize that there are valid reasons that some customers may need to use a straw made of plastic, including to accommodate medical or disability-related needs. Therefore, food service businesses should keep a supply of plastic straws available to meet these needs.

- Food service businesses must post information informing customers that straws are provided only upon request.

Plastic straws are not recyclable. They are too small and light to recycle because they fall through sorting machinery at recycling facilities, including our own Montgomery County Recycling Center. Furthermore, plastic straws are not biodegradable and persist in the environment for many, many years. Plastics do not biodegrade but break down into smaller pieces of microplastic that make its way into our ground water; our food supply; and sea mammals, fish, birds, and other wildlife. Improperly disposed plastic straws can end up as litter, blow out of trashcans, or wash down storm drains ending up in our rivers, streams, and oceans. Because of their small size, fish and other aquatic animals can confuse these bits of plastic for food and ingest or choke on them.

There are a number of viable reusable and compostable alternatives to plastic straws on the market today. These include durable reusable plastic, metal, glass, bamboo, and silicone straws; different types of plant-based compostable products; and compostable/degradable paper straws. Some options are comparably priced and cost competitive to plastic straws. Presumably, if straws are provided only upon request by customers, ultimately there will be cost savings to food service businesses due to reduced usage of straws. We research and provide resource information about these alternatives on our website and can further assist any food service businesses having difficulties in looking for these alternative options.

For all of these reasons, the Montgomery County Department of Environmental Protection proposes Bill 32-20 and request your support of this bill.