

Public Testimony for the Montgomery County Public Hearing on
**Bill 32-20, Solid Waste (Trash) - Waste Reduction/Source Reduction
and Single-Use Straws - Requirements**
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Good morning. I am Julie Sharkey. I am here as the Campaign Manager for Our Last Straw, a non-profit working to build a coalition of restaurants, bars, and others in the hospitality industry. Our goal is to eliminate plastic straws and other single-use plastics in Montgomery County, across Maryland and beyond.

I want to thank the County Council for hearing my testimony today. I support both amendments in front of the committee today and will speak more specifically to **Bill 32-20, Solid Waste (Trash) - Waste Reduction/Source Reduction and Single-Use Straws - Requirements**

We launched Our Last Straw in June of 2018 because we feel that the hospitality industry, being one of the largest purveyors of single-use straws, holds the responsibility to lead the way for a less-wasteful, more sustainable community. We have the power to make this global issue more tangible and can really make change happen.

Our goal is to stop the distribution of plastic straws. To reduce the number of straws making their way into our trash streams in the first place. To address the problem where it starts.

In the Annual Potomac River Watershed Cleanup led by the Alice E. Ferguson Foundation, nearly 10,000 straws were collected – in just one clean up, in just a few hours. These straws add up. Nearly 7.5 million plastic straws were found on U.S. shorelines during a five-year cleanup research project led by the Ocean Conservancy. Extrapolated globally, that is 437 million to 8.3 billion plastic straws on the world's coastlines.

And these are just the straws we see and collect. If this many are found on our shorelines, it's mind boggling to imagine how many are in our oceans.

Plastics can be found in every marine habitat on Earth, from polar ice to the deepest trenches of the ocean. According to a report from the Ellen MacArthur Foundation, by 2050, plastic trash will outweigh fish.

The chemicals in plastics can be found in our ground water, our food supply, and
..... yikes our bodies.

It is clear we need to #StopSucking on plastic straws, stop using plastic stirrers and stoppers.

Some may say, straws are so small, how can they really matter? Actually, they are one of the top ten contributors to ocean debris.

More importantly, just as we have learned with charging for plastic grocery bags, these regulations help us and create critical behavior change. Plastic straws, just like plastic bags, are the gateway to increased awareness about the environmental and health hazards of plastics, and a critical stepping stone on the path to reducing our reliance on single-use plastics.

Yesterday plastic bags, today plastic straws, stirrers, stoppers, and other food service packaging -- all of it leading to a future with more awareness about single-use plastics everywhere.

Single. Use. Yet they endure anywhere from 450 years to forever. Even the creators of early plastics, designed specifically to be amazingly durable and long lasting, didn't imagine we would be creating things for single use and then tossing them away.

Our Last Straw will continue to build our coalition of restaurants, bars, cafes and others.

We will continue to urge individuals to take the pledge to skip the straw.
#StopSucking.

We will continue to work with amazing NGOs. We are grateful for their partnership of the Sierra Club, Ocean Conservancy, Alice Ferguson Foundation, Trash Free Maryland, Annapolis Green, and others.

This is big important, far-reaching community work.

But it cannot be completed without the legislation to support it. These amendments are a critical step. We are swimming in the right direction.

We support these environmentally protective strokes. But at Our Last Straw, we also want to put before the Council that, while important, this is still not enough. PLA compostable plastics are rarely composted because they require very specific industrial composting machines to break them down. Otherwise..... guess what.... they act like regular plastics, lasting for centuries.

So, while it is a great move to eliminate plastic straws, we also know we need to do better, and we hope the council will keep working on the next amendment that includes compostable straws too.

For the health of our county and our citizens, our surrounding areas, our country.
For our planet, and all of its beautiful creatures. Please. Everyone. #StopSucking

Thank you for hearing my testimony.