



Montgomery County Council
100 Maryland Ave.
Rockville, MD 20850

Re: Support for SNAP and WIC Exemptions in the "Bring Your Own Bag" Bill

Dear Members of the Montgomery County Council,

We are writing to express our strong support for the "Bring Your Own Bag" bill with the important inclusion of fee exemptions for SNAP and WIC participants. These exemptions are critical to ensuring that sustainability efforts align with principles of equity and do not disproportionately burden low-income residents.

Bag fees, while an effective incentive to encourage the use of reusable bags, act as a regressive tax for low-income families. This is particularly punitive for SNAP and WIC participants, as program rules prohibit the use of funds for non-food fees or taxes. For families already struggling to make ends meet, an additional cost tied to essential groceries exacerbates financial strain, increasing the risk of food insecurity and amplifying existing economic inequalities.

As of 2021, Montgomery County is home to nearly 64,000 monthly SNAP participants and more than 29,000 monthly participants relying on WIC benefits. Without an exemption, these families would face higher overall grocery costs, undermining the goals of public assistance programs designed to alleviate hunger and poverty.

Paper bag taxes on SNAP/WIC transactions are also disproportionately burdensome compared to cash or credit transactions, because federal rules do not allow SNAP and WIC funds to pay for paper bag fees. The fee on paper bags is designed to be a reminder for most customers paying in cash or credit to bring reusable bags, but not a significant financial burden or practical barrier to carrying groceries home: paper bags will be available for a nominal fee designed not to be financially burdensome for most customers. However, this fee functions as an unequal de facto ban on only customers who are the most reliant on SNAP and WIC to buy their groceries, because unlike cash & credit customers, many SNAP & WIC customers will find themselves unable to get paper bags at all when they have forgotten reusable bags if required to pay a cash fee.

Strong precedent throughout the country demonstrates that SNAP/WIC exemptions are a workable and effective solution to this problem. [California](#), [Colorado](#), [New York](#), [Oregon](#), and [Washington](#) have incorporated SNAP and WIC exemptions in their bag-ban laws, and many such policies have long been implemented effectively without issue. By maintaining this exemption, Montgomery County has the opportunity to demonstrate leadership in environmental equity, ensuring that sustainability efforts are accessible and fair to all residents.

We commend the County for including these protections for our most vulnerable neighbors and urge you to retain this vital language in the bill. By doing so, Montgomery County will set an important precedent, showing that environmental initiatives can and should be designed to support—not penalize—low-income communities.

Thank you for your consideration of this important issue. We are proud to stand with you in advancing policies that prioritize equity, sustainability, and the well-being of all residents.

Sincerely,

Clean Water Action

Gabi Sanchez, Maryland Organizer

Maryland Hunger Solutions

LaMonika Jones, Director

Maryland Center on Economic Policy

Kali Schumitz, Vice President for External Relations

National Aquarium

Ryan Fredriksson, VP, Government Affairs

Centro de Apoyo Familiar [CAF]

Valeria Menjivar, Healthy Families Assistant

Maryland Ornithological Society

Robin Todd, Conservation Chair

The Center for Nature Informed Therapy

Zoe Jack, Advisor

Association for Nature-Based Education

Monica Wiedel-Lubinski, Executive Director