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## **SMITH'S 'CARRYOUT BAG REDUCTION AND RECYCLING ACT' APPROVED IN SENATE ENVIRONMENT AND ENERGY COMMITTEE**

### Legislation Would Reward Consumers for Reducing Their Use of Wasteful Plastic and Paper Bags, Encourage Use of Reusable Grocery Bags

TRENTON - A bill sponsored by Senate Environment and Energy Chairman Bob Smith that would encourage New Jersey residents to bring their own reusable shopping bags when going to the grocery store or buying food items was approved today by the Committee.

"The use of plastic and paper bags are putting a huge strain on the environment," said Senator Smith, D-Middlesex. "Each year, Americans use approximately 100 billion plastic shopping bags, annually putting eight billion pounds of plastic bag trash into the waste stream. Additionally, 14 million trees are cut down each year to support America's consumption of paper bags. Something must change. We can no longer sustain this level of waste and must take responsibility for filling our waterways and oceans with bags that are killing wildlife and contaminating the ecosystem."

The bill, S-812, would require retail establishments such as grocery stores or restaurants to charge customers five cents for each disposable carryout bag provided. Modeled after a successful Washington, DC ordinance, the bill would allow the establishment to keep one cent of the five collected for administrative costs. The remaining four cents would go to a dedicated fund for water quality improvements of the Barnegat Bay.

The bill would also require the disposable bags that the retail establishment provides to be 100 percent recyclable and display the phrase "Please Recycle This Bag." Additionally all paper bags would be required to contain a minimum of 40 percent post-consumer recycled content and plastic bags would be required to be made of either high- or low-density polyethylene film.

The bill would also create the Carryout Bag Credit Program, a voluntary program where an establishment would credit customers at least five cents for providing their own bags. The participating establishment would receive an additional one cent from the five collected for selling bags.

"This bill is about consumer choice," said Senator Smith, D-Middlesex. "We of course hope that people will make the environmentally-conscious choice of reusing their grocery bags and will reward them for that effort, but this bill does not ban one-time use plastic and paper bags for those who wish to continue to use them."

According to a report by National Public Radio, since the program went into effect in Washington, DC in 2010, consumer use of plastic bags has reduced from 22.5 million to only 3 million in January of 2011. The city has also seen an almost complete reduction of plastic bags in the Anacostia River, where prior to the ordinance plastic bags were approximately 50 percent of the trash pulled out of the river.

The bill was approved by the Committee with a vote of 4-0-1. It now heads to the full Senate for approval.