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Resolve, To Convene a Work Group To Design and Implement a Statewide Disposable Checkout Bag Reduction Campaign, with Benchmarks

Whereas, the State has adopted a solid waste management hierarchy that places waste reduction and reuse above recycling as preferred management systems for solid waste; and

Whereas, the State has been an advocate of policies that reduce litter and enhance the natural beauty of the State; and

Whereas, the use of disposable checkout bags consumes valuable natural resources in their production, increases waste generation and contributes to litter; and

Whereas, state law designates recycling requirements for retail establishments that distribute plastic bags; and

Whereas, grocers and retailers in the State recognize resource limitations and they understand the leadership role they play in participating in public awareness programs and adopting programs that can generate environmental benefits; and

Whereas, grocers and retailers in the State have been promoting and encouraging the use of reusable checkout bags for the transport of products and goods from their stores; and

Whereas, this legislation establishes a process to review current law and recycling practices and to establish effective and innovative approaches to reduce the use and increase the recycling of disposable checkout bags; now, therefore, be it

Sec. 1 Convene work group. Resolved: That the Executive Department, State Planning Office shall establish a work group, through a partnership with state agencies and other appropriate entities, to work together towards a viable solution to the checkout bag issue to achieve environmental benefits, maintain financial viability for manufacturers and retailers and avoid cost impacts for consumers; and be it further

Sec. 2 Participants. Resolved: That the Executive Department, State Planning Office shall invite representatives of the following agencies, organizations and businesses to participate in the work group:

1. Department of Environmental Protection;
2. Maine Grocers Association;
3. Maine Merchants Association;
4. Maine Oil Dealers Association;
5. Maine State Chamber of Commerce;
6. Natural Resources Council of Maine;

7. American Chemistry Council;
8. A grocery chain with a large number of stores in the State;
9. A retail store chain with a large number of stores in the State; and
10. Other entities as appropriate; and be it further

Sec. 3 Duties. Resolved: That the work group shall:

1. Assess existing recycling infrastructure capacities within the State;
2. Design a regional pilot program that includes an assessment of current state law governing waste reduction, including, in particular, an assessment of technical assistance available to municipalities and businesses in those municipalities;
3. Create a memorandum of understanding with guiding principles, recycling goals and benchmarks for the overall reduction of disposable checkout bag distribution and waste;
4. Design a statewide promotional media campaign; and
5. Identify funding needs, resources and partners; and be it further

Sec. 4 Existing resources. Resolved: That the duties described in section 3 must be completed within existing resources of the Executive Department, State Planning Office; and be it further

Sec. 5 Report; authority to submit legislation. Resolved: That, by January 15, 2010, the work group shall submit a report relating to the subject matter of this resolve to the Joint Standing Committee on Natural Resources. The report must include findings, recommendations and draft legislation to implement the recommendations. The Joint Standing Committee on Natural Resources may report out legislation relating to the report to the Second Regular Session of the 124th Legislature.