Subject: Enforcement of Existing California Laws on Plastic Bags and Films

Dear Governor Newsom and Attorney General Bonta,

We, the undersigned, urge you to enforce existing laws on labeling of plastic bags and films and distribution of thicker plastic bags. Plastic waste and pollution are harming California’s ecosystems and economy. In particular, plastic bags and films fill our landscapes and contaminate the state’s recycling and composting systems. California has existing laws in place to regulate labeling and distribution of plastic bags and films to protect the State’s consumers, environment, and economy. Enforcement of existing laws will benefit Californians and reduce environmental and economic damage.

We support the letter sent by California Statewide Commission on Recycling Markets and Curbside Recycling on December 3, 2021, calling for the elimination of recycling symbols and labels on plastic bags and films sold in California. As detailed in the Commission’s letter, plastic bags and films cannot legally be claimed as “recyclable” under existing California law. California law (Cal. Bus. & Prof. Code § 17580 and Cal. Pub. Res. Code § 42355.5) and the federal Green Guides (16 C.F.R. § 260.2) require substantiation for recycling for claims such as this. We agree that this claim is not provable.

Furthermore, we urge you to instruct California retail stores to stop selling thicker plastic film bags since they are not “recyclable in the state” as required by law (Cal. Pub. Res. Code § 42881). Californians are being deceived by instructions to “Return the plastic bag to a participating store for recycling” and sent on a wild goose chase with no benefit. It is time to end The Great Store Drop-Off Charade in California. There is not a functioning store take-back system in California because (1) it is not required by law and (2) mixed post-consumer plastic film waste is worthless so there is no reason for stores to voluntarily collect it. Few take-back bins exist and there is no proof that collected materials are actually recycled into new products.

In a comprehensive survey of thicker plastic bags sold by California retail stores performed by The Last Beach Cleanup in November 2021, the most commonly sold thicker plastic bags were
made from agricultural plastic film waste and three major chain stores imported plastic bags with recycled content from Europe. These bags do not contain recycled content from California’s own plastic bags and are destined for California’s landfills or landscapes. (See Appendix 1 of the Commission’s letter for the full results of the survey).

The time for action is now. Thank you for your immediate attention.

Sincerely,

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