



Mayor of Providence

Jorge O. Elorza

March 26, 2018

The Honorable Members of the Providence City Council  
Providence City Hall  
25 Dorrance Street  
Providence, RI 02903

Regarding: Ordinance Amending Chapter 12, "Health and Sanitation," of the Code of Ordinances of the City of Providence to Establish Section 20, "Reduction of Single-Use Checkout Bags by Retail Establishments"

Honorable Members of the City Council,

Single-use plastic bags are a hazard to human health and our environment. They clog up our stormwater infrastructure, pollute our neighborhoods and waterways, and introduce harmful chemicals into our environment and bodies. I applaud the City Council and the community members who support this effort.

It is with much deliberation, however, that I am vetoing this ordinance. While I support the intentions and goals of the policy, a critical step in the process was skipped: robust community engagement and public discourse. The process left certain voices out of the conversation. Those voices, which the Racial and Environmental Justice Committee articulated in their March 14th letter to the City Council and me, are those who have the most at stake from this policy. They are the neighborhoods that are most burdened by plastic pollution and the community members that are least able to afford more expensive alternatives. There is no harm done in taking our time to do this right, but we do risk harm if we exclude or ignore these communities and their concerns in this process.

I am confident that with more time for public discourse and these voices centered in that process, we can come up with a plastic bag policy that eliminates this environmental hazard from our community, while not burdening our low-income residents. By being deliberate and intentional about who is at the table, we can create an effective policy that makes our communities stronger, rather than divide us. Once that is done, I look forward to signing this into law.

I look forward to working with the City Council, the Zero Waste Providence group, the Racial and Environmental Justice Committee, and other members of our community who share our goal in resolving these concerns and signing this policy into law this year.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be "Jorge O. Elorza", written in a cursive style.

Jorge O. Elorza  
Mayor