

Baltimore to say bye to plastic bags at checkout, starting early next year

January 14 2020, by Talia Richman



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Mayor Bernard C. "Jack" Young signed a bill Monday that bans retailers' use of plastic bags, saying he was proud Baltimore is "leading the way in creating cleaner neighborhoods and waterways."

The law will prohibit grocers and other retailers from giving out [plastic](#) bags, and requiring them to charge a nickel for any other bag they supply to shoppers, including paper bags. Retailers would keep 4 cents from the fee for each alternative bag they supply, with a penny going to city coffers.

Environmental advocates, who championed the bill, call it an important step toward reducing plastic pollution.

Young signed the bill while surrounded by marine life at the National Aquarium along the Inner Harbor. He was joined by some of the City Council members who pushed for this legislation; it had been proposed nine times since 2006.

"Single-use plastics are not worth the convenience," said John Racanelli, CEO of the National Aquarium. "My hope is that one day we can walk Baltimore's streets and parks and never again see a [plastic bag](#) choking the branches of a tree or cartwheeling down a street or fouling the waters of our Inner Harbor."

The mayor pledged to fight for a statewide ban in the General Assembly.

The law will take effect in early 2021. Those found to violate the ban three times or more would face a fine of up to \$1,000.

It will apply to [grocery stores](#), [convenience stores](#), pharmacies, restaurants and gas stations, although some types of products would be exempt, such as fresh fish, meat or produce, newspapers, dry cleaning and prescription drugs.

The city is counting on people to switch up shopping habits and relying more on reusable bags.

Some retailers opposed the ban because they said it placed too heavy a [financial burden](#) on retailers. Paper bags are much more expensive to buy than plastic ones, grocers testified during hearings.

Jerry Gordon, the owner of Eddie's Market, said he will continue to hand out plastic bags until the ban takes effect. "They are more economical and much easier for my clients to carry," he said.

He said he will comply with the law when the time comes. Already, he estimates about 30% of his customers come to his Charles Village store with reusable bags.

"It's hard to tell how much it will cost," he said. "People will adapt, as time goes on, to getting reusable bags, so it's very hard to tell."

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