



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Tony Avella

Avella Introduces Legislation Increasing Visibility of Plastic Bag Recycle Stations

ANDREI VASILESCU March 24, 2016



(Albany, NY) – Yesterday, State Senator Tony Avella introduced a bill (S.7085) requiring store owners to keep their plastic bag collection bins at the entrance, clearly indicated with a sign and a requirement that they empty them regularly. The bill would allow the Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC) to determine the fine that would be assessed on store owners who fail to comply.

Although owners of retail establishments with over 10,000 square feet of retail space or chain stores with 5 or more franchises with over 5,000 square feet of retail space are already required to have plastic bag recycle bins, Senator Avella felt the law was ineffective unless these bins were clearly presented to customers entering a store. The bill would require recycle bins to be located near the entrance, marked by a sign explaining that grocery store bags, dry cleaning bags, newspaper bags and other film plastic can be deposited for recycling – all in a large readable font.

“By making plastic bag recycle bins more visible, people will become more conscious of their responsibility to recycle. Customers will get home and think twice about discarding their plastic bags in the trash once they’re empty; People will remember that there is a better place to put the bag than in the garbage. This will undoubtedly increase the amount of people who recycle and decrease the amount of waste that ends up in dumps, incapable of decomposing. This is a smart move for New York – a green move,” said State Senator Tony Avella.

Avella’s law would increase recycling habits without placing taxes on plastic bags, as other jurisdictions including Washington D.C. have imposed. It’s been largely debated whether the D.C. 5 cent tax on plastic bags has actually changed behavior habits. As the Washington Post reported, increasing tax revenue from the bag tax shows that people have not steadily moved away from plastic bags, as was estimated, and that behaviors haven’t significantly shifted towards reusable bags.

While behaviors may not change, the ten cent tax on plastic bags which the New York City Council is considering instituting will certainly burden low-income families, costing them as much as several dollars a week. During a City Council hearing, lawmakers and activists, including Bertha Lewis of Black Leadership Action Committee, expressed strong disagreements on the 10-cent fee proposal, arguing that it would be a tax on those who could least afford it.

"We can't fight inequality by passing laws that disproportionately hurt low-income communities of color. And that's exactly what this regressive plastic bag tax will do. At a time when New York City is becoming less and less affordable, and longtime neighborhood residents are facing the pressures of gentrification, we can't allow this misguided tax to pass," said Bertha Lewis, Founder and President of the Black Institute.

Store owners would also be required to empty the bin regularly so that overly stuffed bins don't dissuade other customers from contributing their plastic. DEC will be in charge of assessing the amount fined to store operators who don't comply with the law.