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Audubon Society of Rhode Island

February 6, 2020

Representative David Bennett
Chair, House Committee on Environment and Natural Resources
Rhode Island State House
Providence, RI 02908

Re: Audubon Society of Rhode Island Supports H7306, Plastic Waste Reduction Act

Dear Chairman Bennett and members of the House Committee on Environment,

The Audubon Society of Rhode Island and our 17,000 members thank Representatives McEntee, Shekarchi, Bennett, Craven, Knight for introducing this important piece of legislation. We support the bill and urge you to pass it to the House floor for a vote.

Audubon was an active participant on the 2019 Governor's Task Force to Tackle Plastics and we actively engaged with plastic bag bills in play last session. We are delighted to see this bill so early in the 2020 session and commend Representative McEntee and the other sponsors for their leadership on this important issue. We are very pleased that the bill includes "handles which are stitched" in the definition of "Reusable bags". This language is consistent with municipal bans in place in communities throughout the state and will ensure that the bill's impact is as intended – eliminating plastic shopping bags from stores throughout Rhode Island.

We support the language under 23-19.17-3 (b) which encourages retailers to make reusable carryout bags available to the public, providing support to low-income households. Audubon understands that low-income families many not have the expendable income needed to purchase reusable bags and appreciates all efforts to minimize this burden.

Last year, some municipalities raised concerns about the costs of enforcing the law. Thank you for ensuring that any penalties collected are retained by the municipality, to help offset the cost of implementing the law.

This bill does not preempt local action, which we support. Local leadership has resulted in bag bans in 15 Rhode Island communities and built the momentum for statewide action. We also support the \$0.05 fee for paper bags. Studies throughout the country have shown that the fee further incentivizes the move to reusable bags.

Thank you for considering these comments.

Sincerely,

Meg Kerr
Senior Director of Policy