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Assemblymember Friedman Leads on Bill to Reduce Single-use Plastic Packaging Waste

SACRAMENTO — Assemblymember Laura Friedman (D-Glendale) has announced Assembly Bill 1371, which aims to reduce single-use plastic waste generated in the e-commerce marketplace. AB 1371 will phase out certain single-use plastic packaging that is often added to goods for shipment of direct-to-consumer e-commerce purchases. Joining Friedman on the bill are Assemblymembers Phil Ting (D-San Francisco), Lorena Gonzalez (D- San Diego), Richard Bloom (D-Santa Monica), Wendy Carrillo (D –Los Angeles), Ash Kalra (D-San Jose), and Mark Stone (D-Monterey Bay), as well as Senators Ben Allen (D-Santa Monica), Henry Stern (D-Canoga Park) and Scott Wiener (D-San Francisco).

Sales in the e-commerce marketplace have skyrocketed as consumers turn towards online orders for more of their retail purchases. A large majority of shipping envelopes and packaging materials such as bubble wrap and packing peanuts are made of plastic. The vast majority of this plastic becomes waste immediately after a package is opened where it is then landfilled, burned, or enters and pollutes the environment.

Most municipal recycling programs in California do not accept plastic shipping envelopes, plastic air pillows, bubble wrap or expanded polystyrene (including packing peanuts and molded foam). This category of plastic waste increases disposal costs for local communities, their residents and businesses, and has been found to harm marine life. In the U.S. alone, 469 million pounds of plastic packaging waste was generated in e-commerce business in 2019 – before the COVID-19 pandemic hit.

“The amount of single-use, non-recyclable plastic being used in packaging only continues to skyrocket and its impacts on our environment are disturbing and costly,” said Assemblymember Laura Friedman. “These plastics, used for a very short period of time, are ending up in our waterways, clogging our waste systems, and worst of all – they’ll take centuries to degrade. As we continue to shift more towards online retailers, we have to ensure they’re operating sustainably.”

“We commend Assemblymember Friedman for her leadership to address the growing waste stream generated by unnecessary single-use plastic packaging used in the e-commerce marketplace,” said Ashley Blacow-Draeger, Pacific Policy and Communications Manager with Oceana.

“Californians shouldn’t have to worry that the packaging that comes with our online purchases will pollute our oceans, our coasts, and our communities every time we place an order. Alternatives to single-use plastic packaging are available and consumers are calling for plastic-free choices.”

“Our one-and-done habits are really hurting our environment. Since it’s clear online shopping will continue post-pandemic, we must get a grip on wasteful, single-use packaging. AB 1371 is one solution, accelerating the shift to shipping materials that are more sustainable,” said Assemblymember Phil Ting.

“Curbing our plastic consumption of single-use products has reached a tipping point and action needs to be taken that transitions consumers and businesses towards more sustainable alternatives,” said Assemblymember Ash Kalra. “AB 1371 makes a positive step towards that goal and will eliminate a sizeable amount of plastic waste within the e-commerce industry.”

“Even before this pandemic, consumers were getting inundated by unnecessary plastic packaging every time they ordered something online,” said Senator Ben Allen, chair of the Senate Environmental Quality Committee. “After another year of this flimsy, unrecyclable plastic waste, and knowing there are better alternatives, consumers are demanding change. This bill will get this unusable material out of our waste systems and better protect our environment from this superfluous garbage.”

“More than 18 billion pounds of plastic waste pour into our oceans every single year and that has to stop if we are going to reverse the environmental damage that continues to be done day after day after day,” said Senator Henry Stern, the chair of the Senate Natural Resources & Water Committee. “We will never be able to recycle our way out of this crisis; we need to cut off the problem at the source, which means putting an end to the use of single-use plastics.”

“The COVID-19 pandemic led to a 300% rise in single-use plastics waste. Only 9% of plastics waste is recycled. The rest is burned or dumped in landfills, the ocean, or on the ground. AB 1371 builds on existing efforts to combat waste, and is an important step to significantly reduce plastic waste that pollutes our environment, harms marine, terrestrial, and avian wildlife, and hurts people – disproportionately low income communities of color – while simultaneously providing financial savings to businesses, who no longer have to pay for plastics used in shipping, and local governments, who no longer have to pay to clean them up,” said Assemblywoman Wendy Carrillo

If successful, this measure would phase out the use of plastic films, cushioning, and other plastic packaging materials in California, including materials used for shipping into the state, by January 1st, 2023 for large online retailers, and January 1st, 2025 for small online retailers. It would also require online retailers with at least one physical storefront in the state, or retailers that provide lockers for the secure pickup of goods, to allow those locations to take back plastic waste from consumers for recycling.

AB 1371 will face its first hearing and vote in the Assembly Natural Resources Committee on April 14th.

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Laura Friedman represents the 43rd Assembly District which encompasses the cities of Burbank, Glendale, and La Cañada Flintridge, as well as the communities of La Crescenta and Montrose, and the Los Angeles neighborhoods of Atwater Village, Beachwood Canyon, Los Feliz, East Hollywood, Franklin Hills, and Silver Lake.