

Governor Quinn Vetoes “Plastic Bag” Bill, Calls it a Roadblock to Innovation

Written by Erin Wilson

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Victory for environment

CHICAGO – August 26, 2012. Governor Pat Quinn today vetoed a bill which would have removed the right of home rule communities to implement innovative solutions to the plastic bag litter problem. In his veto message, the governor said the bill is more restrictive on municipalities than any other plastic bag regulation in the country, which would have created a roadblock for locals to choose policies that fit the needs of the area.

The governor also reiterated his commitment to working with communities, businesses and advocates to pass a better bill in the next legislative session to increase recycling.

“Justice Louis Brandeis once called states the ‘laboratories of democracy’ for our nation. Let’s not tie the hands of innovative Illinois municipalities that are laboratories of reform for Illinois,” Governor Quinn said. “While well-intentioned, this legislation is a roadblock to innovation that would do little to boost recycling in Illinois. We can do better.”

Senate Bill 3442, also known as the “plastic bag” bill, would have required manufacturers to register with the Illinois Environmental Protection Agency and stamp a number on each plastic bag. The bill would have outlawed the purchase of plastic bags from non-registered manufacturers and prohibited municipalities from enacting their own recycling programs, fees

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or outright bans on plastic bags.

The bill was opposed by the Illinois Municipal League and 150 municipalities who saw it as an undermining of home rule. Under the 1970 Illinois Constitution, home rule enables municipalities to exercise greater control over local problems. Illinois currently has 209 home rule units whose authority would have been weakened by this bill.

“This bill was an assault on the principle of home rule and the idea that innovations can come from municipalities,” said Mayor Don Gerard of Champaign, whose City Council was moving towards regulation of plastic bags in retail stores. “If the City of Champaign and other towns want to put a fee on plastic bags or ban them or do nothing, it should be our choice.”

Municipalities around the nation are tackling the plastic bag litter problem with innovative methods. Washington D.C., for example, has imposed a nickel per bag fee which has reduced plastic bag usage by 80 percent. Outright bans have been enacted by 40 local governments in California (including San Francisco and Los Angeles County), Seattle, Austin and elsewhere.

Plastic bag litter is a growing and expensive problem throughout the nation. Plastic bags are found tangled in trees, littering waterways and harming wildlife. Governor Quinn is committed to enacting policies that prevent pollution and safeguard our communities and natural resources. Today’s veto received praise from environmental advocates.

“With this veto, Governor Quinn has completed the 2012 legislative session with a perfect record for the environment,” said Jennifer Walling, Executive Director of the Illinois Environmental Council.

“Illinois has a history of upholding home rule authority. This bill would have handcuffed communities wishing to implement innovative solutions,” said the Sierra Club’s Jack Darin, one of 14 signers of a letter from religious and environmental groups urging a veto.

In addition, Governor Quinn noted the efforts of 13-year old Abby Goldberg, whose online petition drive to stop the bill garnered 175,000 signatures. Last year, the 7th grader at Prairie

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Crossing Charter School in Grayslake, Illinois, was given the assignment in her environmental awareness class to design an environmental project. She decided to convince her village board to enact a ban on plastic bags. When she learned that a bill was moving through the Legislature to prevent Grayslake and other towns from enacting such a ban, she took action.

“I love animals. When I saw birds and turtles choked by plastic bags, it hurt,” Goldberg said. “I’ve learned that no matter what your age, you can make a difference.”

Opponents to the bill and those urging a veto include the Illinois Municipal League, Northwest Municipal Conference, nearly 150 municipalities, Sierra Club, Illinois Environmental Council, Environment Illinois, Illinois Recycling Association, Chicago Recycling Coalition, Prairie River Network, Alliance for the Great Lakes, Center for Neighborhood Technology, Natural Resources Defense Council, Faith in Place, Protestants for the Common Good, Illinois Policy Institute, Surfrider Chicago, Center for Oceanic Awareness, the 175,000 signers of Abby Goldberg’s online petition and others.

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