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KansasInterfaithAction.org

Rabbi Moti Rieber, Executive Director
Rev. Sarah Oglesby-Dunegan, Board Chair

Written Testimony by Rabbi Moti Rieber, Executive Director
in Opposition to HB 2625, Plastic Bag Ban Pre-emption
House Commerce, Labor and Economic Activity Committee, Rep. Sean Tarwater, chair
February 20, 2020

Mr. Chairman, Ranking member Frownfelter, members of the committee:

My name is Rabbi Moti Rieber, and I am Executive Director of Kansas Interfaith Action, is a statewide, multi-faith issue advocacy organization that educates, engages and advocates on behalf of people of faith and the public regarding critical social, economic, and climate justice issues. KIFA's role is to bring a moral voice to issues of public policy in Kansas. We represent over 2000 people of faith throughout Kansas, and also serve as the State Public Policy Office of the Central States Synod of the ELCA Lutheran Church, so I am also representing the Kansas chapter of Lutherans Restoring Creation, in opposition to HB 2625.

The individuals, faith communities and denominations that make up Kansas Interfaith Action take as the very core of our mission, care of God's Creation. It needs to be said as clearly as possible: Our concern for creation care is an inseparable part of our religious identity. This becomes all the more important as Creation becomes more polluted by human activity, particularly human-caused climate disruption. I quote from the mission statement of LRC:

In all that we do, we seek to engage this work as a response to the grace of God manifested throughout creation ... knowing that it is ultimately God's creative and redemptive love for creation that prompts us and sustains us in this work. We welcome the prayers and the support of all who would join with us in this work.

There are three bases on which we oppose this bill. First, on the policy. There are numerous reasons to ban single use plastic bags. The pollute our water and land; they are not really recyclable and they don't biodegrade; they are extremely energy intensive to produce and they use fossil fuels and therefore contribute to climate disruption.

The states of California, Hawaii, and Oregon, and the territories of American Samoa, Guam, US Virgin Islands and Puerto Rico have banned disposable bags. The states of Connecticut, Delaware, Maine, New York, and Vermont have passed bans that will into effect in this year or next. Over 200 counties and municipalities have enacted ordinances either imposing a fee on plastic bags or banning them outright.

Second, on the process, or the precedent. It is very difficult in the Kansas legislature to develop policy, or even to have a conversation about, environment or climate. There are no committees dedicated to addressing these issues; the only germane committees are commodity committees like agriculture or utilities. When Kansas citizens do the hard work of organizing and themselves to convince their municipalities to address the relatively low-hanging fruit of single use plastic bags, industry groups fueled by fossil fuel money come to the legislature to preempt it. It's anti-democratic as well as anti-environmental.

And third: this legislature has been and continues to be derelict in its duty to address climate change – both the causes, and the effects. We are already seeing effects in Kansas in terms of health impacts, water availability, floods and droughts, increased wildfires, heat impact days, etc. etc. Yet we don't talk about that. The only policy related to environmental or climate that is able to get a hearing is an anti-environmental, anti-climate, fossil-fueled bill like this one. It's frustrating beyond belief. We're fiddling while the world burns.

Mr. Chairman, we need policy on this issue, but it's not this one. My preferred policy would be a statewide fee on single use plastic bags, with the funding to go into a dedicated fund for climate resilience projects. That's not the conversation we're having here today, but it's the conversation we need to have. Please vote down HB 2625, and let's, at long last, start to have that conversation. Thank you for your attention.