



September 15, 2021

Arlington County Board
2100 Clarendon Boulevard, Suite 300
Arlington, VA 22201

Dear Chair de Ferranti,

The Arlington Chamber of Commerce encourages Arlington County not to impose a five-cent tax on plastic shopping bags at this time. There is a risk that the tax will not be able to fulfill its purpose if developments in the COVID-19 pandemic lead retailers to reinstate bans on reusable bags. The roll-out of this tax could also lead to inequitable access to reusable bags and information about the tax for consumers and retailers.

The General Assembly's rationale in granting localities the ability to impose a tax on plastic grocery bags was to incentivize consumers to switch to reusable carriers. Earlier in the COVID-19 pandemic, some grocers suspended the use of patron-provided totes as a safety precaution, precluding customers from switching and frustrating the purpose of the tax. The Delta and other variants have created more uncertainty about the course of the pandemic. Arlington County should not impose this tax now, given the possibility that stores could reinstate such restrictions to protect their front-line employees if the pandemic worsens.

There is also considerable risk that the tax's impacts will be felt inequitably across the community. Arlington County admirably proposes to engage in public education and to purchase reusable bags for WIC and SNAP program beneficiaries, but there is still likely to be an awareness and access gap, impeding the desired behavior change. Moreover, retailers will have a short time to get educated about the plastic bag tax or risk enforcement actions taken against them. The Chamber is concerned that Arlington's smaller, independent, neighborhood-serving retailers are far more likely than larger retailers to face such actions, exacerbating the inequities from this tax.

Imposing this tax outside Arlington's usual budget process and during the persistence of the COVID-19 pandemic risks unintended and inequitable consequences. As such, we encourage Arlington County not to impose a plastic bag tax at this time and we thank you for your consideration of these comments.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Kate Bates". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Kate Bates
President & CEO

CC: Arlington County Board Vice Chair Katie Cristol, and members Christian Dorsey, Libby Garvey, and Takis Karantonis; County Manager Mark Schwartz; Deputy County Manager Michelle Cowan; Adam Reidel and Erik Grabowski, Department of Environmental Services; Kate Paine, Arlington Economic Development