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California lawmakers send governor a ban on single-use plastic bags



David Yeretsian places a bag of tomatoes in a single-use plastic bag for a customer at Sasoun Produce in Los Angeles in June. (Kevork Djansezian / Bloomberg)

By **PATRICK MCGREEVY**

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The state Senate on Friday gave final legislative approval to a measure that would phase out single-use plastic bags in supermarkets, pharmacies and convenience stores as part of an effort to rid beaches and streets of litter.

The measure, which now goes to Gov. Jerry Brown for consideration, would allow stores to charge customers 10 cents to provide paper or reusable plastic bags as an alternative to single-use bags.

California would be the first state government to approve such a ban although the bags are outlawed throughout Hawaii because of local jurisdiction laws.

Sen. Alex Padilla (D-Pacoima) said his bill just makes statewide what more than 120 cities and counties in California have already done.

“We have seen a groundswell of action in this direction at the local level,” Padilla told colleagues. “But this is a statewide problem meriting a statewide solution.”

The ban would kick in for grocery stores and pharmacies on July 1, 2015, and would extend to convenience and liquor stores a year later. The 100 cities and counties that already have bans would be grandfathered in.

The bill was opposed by Republicans, including Ted Gaines of Rocklin. “I’m quite frankly offended by having the state dictate what we need and don’t need in our lives,” he told his colleagues.

The measure was opposed by a group of bag-makers calling themselves the American Progressive Bag Alliance, which warned the legislation would hurt the economy while enriching grocery stores that can charge customers for paper and reusable bags.

Paul Bauer, a lobbyist for the group, said the bill will eliminate 2,000 jobs and replace one plastic bag with another. The current bags are not all wasted, he said.

“People put these to use all over their house doing a variety of different things,” Bauer told lawmakers at a hearing on the bill Friday.

Sen. Jean Fuller (R-Bakersfield) said the idea of the state training consumers on which products to use “absolutely is not the American way.”

With one-third of California under plastic-bag bans adopted at the local level, the evidence is that the bans are not hurting the economy, according to Mark Murray, executive director of Californians Against Waste.

“We now have years of data from cities and counties throughout California to show that this policy is not just working to reduce plastic-bag litter and waste and pollution, reduce greenhouse gas emissions, but it’s saving consumers money and there has not been a loss of jobs,” Murray told lawmakers Friday.

The legislation would also provide \$2 million in competitive loans to bag-makers to transition into making reusable bags.

The measure was supported by environmental groups, including Heal the Bay and the California League of Conservation Voters, as well as labor and business groups, including United Food and Commercial Workers Western States Council and the California Grocers Assn.

“This important step forward shows that we can achieve lasting victories for ocean and environmental health,” said Nathan Weaver, an oceans advocate with Environment California.

More than 14 billion single-use plastic bags are distributed by retailers each year and 88% of plastic bags are not recycled, according to the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency. In California, only 3% are recycled, according to CalRecycle.

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