

TO: BOARD OF LEGISLATORS
COUNTY OF WESTCHESTER

Your Committee recommends adoption of “A LOCAL LAW amending the Laws of Westchester County by adding Chapter 542 regarding single-use foodware, beverage stirrers, and splash sticks.”

Your Committee understands that plastic utensils, stirrers, splash sticks, and condiment packets—among other single-use foodware items—are prevalent in Westchester County and around the world. According to a 2018 *Nature Magazine* article, globally, more than 320 million tons of plastic are consumed every year, and the use of plastics has continued to expand. In 2019, *National Geographic* reported that plastic production has increased exponentially, from 2.3 million tons in 1950, to 448 million tons in 2015; production will likely double by the year 2050. The manufacture of these plastics, which are made of petroleum and other fossil fuels, contributes to climate change and pollution.

Your Committee acknowledges that with the ubiquitous use of plastics and other disposable single-use items, comes staggering waste. People in the United States produce more plastic waste than in any other nation—an average of 231 pounds of plastic per year, according to a 2020 *Forbes* article. As for plastic utensils, specifically, a 2020 *Forbes* piece explained, “[s]ome estimates put the number of individual plastic utensils wasted at 40 billion per year in the United States alone. After just one single use, most of them are thrown out and end up in landfills and in our waterways.”

Your committee is aware that single-use foodware items, made both from plastics and from other types of materials, are commonly littered and thrown-away. Contaminated plastic utensils in particular generally cannot be recycled, and *National Geographic* reported in 2019 that billions of plastic forks, knives, and spoons are discarded every year. These plastic utensils can take centuries to break down, while they work their way into the environment. This is true of all plastics: according to a 2022 *New York Times* article, only about 9 percent of all plastics ever manufactured have been recycled, while nearly 80 percent have ended up in landfills, dumps, or the environment; the remainder are and have been burned, emitting pollutants that contribute to global warming. When plastic breaks down into smaller and smaller pieces, it harms sea life, wildlife, and threatens human health.

Your Committee recognizes that this Local Law, in making single-use foodware items and condiment packets available upon request, and in banning certain plastic items (splash sticks and stirrers) altogether, will eliminate some of the plastic consumption and pollution in the County. The law may also raise awareness about the simple decisions County residents can make to reduce their waste. Moreover, as *Westchester Magazine* explained in 2019, many businesses in Westchester County have already begun to take steps towards reducing this type of rubbish—for instance, some have stopped automatically providing single-use utensils with to-go orders, while others no longer offer plastic straws unless they are specifically requested. Notably, takeout and delivery from restaurants increased dramatically during the pandemic, and those orders often arrived with single-use foodware items that were not necessarily needed or desired by people eating at home. This trend coincided with single use-foodware items becoming more expensive for businesses. In addition to reducing waste, this proposed Local Law will also spare food

providers the financial burdens associated with providing unnecessary utensils, napkins, and condiment packets for every order they receive.

Your Committee notes that the intent of this Local Law is to maintain a healthful environment, and to benefit the health, safety, and welfare of County residents. The Local Law prohibits food service establishments and retail food stores from providing single-use foodware items, as defined—including, but not limited to, forks, knives, spoons, chopsticks, cup sleeves, beverage lids—or condiment packets to any dine-in or take-away customers, either directly or through a food delivery service, unless the items are specifically requested. The law would also prohibit food service establishments and retail food store cafes from providing any plastic beverage stirrers or plastic splash sticks. Finally, the law would ban, under most circumstances, foodware or condiment packets that are packaged together in a way that precludes a customer from selecting only the type of single-use foodware item or condiment packet that the customer wants—for instance, forks, knives, spoons, napkins, and salt and pepper packets that are bundled together in plastic wrap.

To further compliance, the Local Law provides for ordering option requirements, such that a customer must be allowed to request any applicable single-use foodware items or condiment packets when ordering food. Moreover, food service establishments and retail food stores will be responsible for coordinating with any third-party food delivery service as necessary in order to prompt the customer to affirmatively request the single-use foodware items or condiment packets that they want. Food service establishments and retail food stores, as applicable, must also post at least one sign advising clientele that single-use foodware items and condiment packets are

available upon request. This Local Law will be enforced by the County Department of Health and the County Department of Environmental Facilities.

Your Committee is informed that the proposed project does not meet the definition of an action under New York State Environmental Quality Review Act (“SEQRA”) and its implementing regulations, 6 NYCRR Part 617. Please refer to the memorandum from the Department of Planning, dated January 12, 2023, which is on file with the Clerk of the Board of Legislators. Your Committee concurs in this conclusion.

In light of all of the foregoing, your Committee recommends passage of this Local Law.

Dated: _____, 2023
White Plains, New York

COMMITTEE ON

RESOLUTION NO. ____ – 2023

RESOLVED, that this Board hold a public hearing pursuant to Section 209.141(4) of the Laws of Westchester County on Local Law Intro. No. ____ - 2023, entitled “A LOCAL LAW amending the Laws of Westchester County by adding Chapter 542 regarding single-use foodware, beverage stirrers, and splash sticks.” The public hearing will be held at __.m. on the ____ day of _____, 2023, in the Chambers of the Board of Legislators, 8th Floor, Michaelian Office Building, White Plains, New York. The Clerk of the Board shall cause notice of the time and date of such hearing to be published at least once in one or more newspapers published in the County of Westchester and selected by the Clerk of the Board for that purpose in the manner and time required by law.