ASSEMBLY RESOLUTION No. 71

STATE OF NEW JERSEY

219th LEGISLATURE

PRE-FILED FOR INTRODUCTION IN THE 2020 SESSION

Sponsored by:
Assemblywoman LISA SWAIN
District 38 (Bergen and Passaic)

SYNOPSIS

Encourages citizens to reduce or eliminate use of plastic straws and stirrers.

CURRENT VERSION OF TEXT

Introduced Pending Technical Review by Legislative Counsel.

AN ASSEMBLY RESOLUTION encouraging citizens to reduce or eliminate their use of disposable plastic straws and stirrers.

WHEREAS, New Jersey's oceans, beaches, and waterways are among the State's most iconic and beloved natural resources; and

WHEREAS, These invaluable and unique ecological environments are increasingly under threat from an increase in plastic pollutants; and

WHEREAS, Plastic straws and stirrers are an increasingly large proportion of the plastic waste found in the waters of the State, and are frequently listed as the most commonly found trash items at beach clean-ups; and

WHEREAS, Disposable plastic straws and stirrers are used for mere moments, but last indefinitely as discarded waste, as they are not suitable for traditional recycling of plastics, and are discarded in landfills or as litter; and

WHEREAS, Birds and marine life may mistake these items for food, and die from poisoning or choking in the attempt to consume them; and

WHEREAS, Large plastics degrade into microplastics, which enter the food chain and pose a significant threat to filter feeders who are exposed to consuming large amounts of plastic; and

WHEREAS, The World Economic Forum has warned that at the present rate, there will be more plastic than fish in the oceans by 2050; and

WHEREAS, Many cities across the country have already introduced legislation limiting the distribution of disposable plastic straws, including Seattle, Malibu, and Miami Beach; and

WHEREAS, Every citizen has a duty to make decisions that will protect the environment for generations to come, and individuals should be reflective about how their consumer choices contribute to environmental problems; and

WHEREAS, Most people have easily accessible alternatives to disposable plastic straws and stirrers, but do not use them out of minor inconvenience, apathy, or a lack of knowledge about the aggregate impacts of using disposable plastic straws and stirrers; and

WHEREAS, Many companies produce reusable straws made out of stainless steel, plastics, or bamboo, the use of which would greatly reduce the amount of plastic entering the waste stream; and

WHEREAS, Reducing consumer demand for disposable plastic straws and stirrers will have large impacts as more businesses would be encouraged to stop offering these single-use plastics in the first instance; and

WHEREAS, Reducing consumer demand for disposable plastic straws and stirrers may also serve as an important early step to encourage New Jerseyans to make other environmentally minded decisions in their personal lives; and

WHEREAS, Other countries, such as Ireland, have succeeded in changing consumer attitudes around the use of plastics, and New Jerseyans should continue to adopt a similar culture of consumer conscientiousness; and

WHEREAS, The State, and all of its citizenry, have a duty to keep New Jersey's shores pristine and free of harmful debris now and for generations to come; now, therefore,

BE IT RESOLVED *by the General Assembly of the State of New Jersey:*

1. This House encourages citizens to reduce or eliminate their use of disposable plastic straws and stirrers by using reusable straws and stirrers, and by advocating for the reduction in the use of disposable straws and stirrers to the businesses they frequent and to other citizens.

2. The Governor and the Commissioner of Environmental Protection are respectfully requested to issue similar proclamations to this one in order to raise public awareness of this pressing environmental issue.

3. Copies of this resolution, as filed with Secretary of State, shall be transmitted by the Clerk of the General Assembly to the Governor of New Jersey, the Commissioner of the New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection, the New Jersey Food Council, the New Jersey Restaurant and Hospitality Association, and the New Jersey Chamber of Commerce.

STATEMENT

This resolution encourages New Jerseyans to reduce or eliminate their use of disposable plastic straws and stirrers.

New Jersey's oceans, beaches, and waterways are among the State's most iconic and beloved natural resources, and these invaluable and unique ecological environments are increasingly under threat from an increase in plastic pollutants. Plastic straws and stirrers are an increasingly large proportion of the plastic waste found in the waters of the State, and although disposable plastic straws and stirrers are used for mere moments, they last indefinitely as discarded waste.

Disposable plastic straws and stirrers are not suitable for traditional recycling of plastics, and are discarded in landfills or as litter. Plastic straws and stirrers are frequently listed as the most commonly found trash at beach clean-ups. Furthermore, birds and marine life may mistake these items for food, and die from poisoning or choking in the attempt to consume them. Large

plastics degrade into microplastics, which enter the food chain and pose a significant threat to filter feeders who are exposed to consuming large amounts of plastic. The World Economic Forum has warned that at the present rate, there will be more plastic than fish in the oceans by 2050.

Many cities across the country have already introduced legislation limiting the distribution of disposable plastic straws, including Seattle, Malibu, and Miami Beach. Every citizen has a duty to make decisions that will protect the environment for generations to come, and individuals should be reflective about how their consumer choices contribute to environmental problems. Most people have easily accessible alternatives to disposable plastic straws and stirrers, but do not use them out of minor inconvenience, apathy, or a lack of knowledge about the aggregate impacts of using disposable plastic straws and stirrers. Many companies produce reusable straws made out of stainless steel, plastics, or bamboo, the use of which would greatly reduce the amount of plastic entering the waste stream.

Reducing consumer demand for disposable plastic straws and stirrers will have large impacts as more businesses would be encouraged to stop offering these single-use plastics in the first instance. Reducing consumer demand for disposable plastic straws and stirrers may also serve as an important early step to encourage New Jerseyans to make other environmentally minded decisions in their personal lives. Other countries, such as Ireland, have succeeded in changing consumer attitudes around the use of plastics, and New Jerseyans should continue to adopt a similar culture of consumer conscientiousness. The State, and all of its citizenry, have a duty to keep New Jersey’s shores pristine and free of harmful debris now and for generations to come.