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# SISTERS OF CHARITY OF LEAVENWORTH

OFFICE OF JUSTICE, PEACE, AND INTEGRITY OF CREATION



Date: January 31<sup>st</sup>, 2023

To: Senate Committee on Commerce

From: John Shively, Lead Coordinator

RE: Opposition to Senate Bill 47

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Dear Chairwoman Erickson and Members of the Committee,

The Sisters of Charity follow in the tradition of St. Vincent de Paul and St. Louise de Marillac, who began the daughters of charity with a particular emphasis on serving those living in poverty. Our community of Catholic Sisters and Associates has long maintained a Care of Creation Committee, whose stated purpose is to “Educate and collaborate with others to heal the Earth and ourselves of the destructive effects of climate change.” This long-standing commitment to caring for the planet is why I write to you today in opposition to Senate Bill 47.

### **This is a decision for local communities to make**

While the proponents of Senate Bill 47 will likely tell you that a standardized regulatory framework is best for business across the state, as you well know the job of elected officials is not solely to make the business environment simple. Elected officials have to balance public interests, private rights, and business interests to make the best public policy for the state.

**We believe that the best policy is to let each local community and local consumers to make their own decisions, and defer to those localities' democratic processes following our belief in Home Rule.** After all, each local community faces several different factors when weighing a decision like this – such as whether this is a measure pushed by the preference of citizens, how the community handles recycling and the disposal of solid waste, and the level of concern in that community about plastic pollution and biological harm.

### **The production of plastic containers and plastic bags has real environmental, health, and ecological impacts**

America has a plastic bag problem. Americans, on average, use **365 plastic bags per person per year**. Compare that to a county like Denmark, where shoppers use an average of four plastic bags a year and you realize, America has a unique dependence on the use of plastic bags. <sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.nationalgeographic.com/science/article/plastics-facts-infographics-ocean-pollution>

This would not necessarily be a problem if plastic bags were a morally neutral item – but they are not. The extraction and production of plastic bags use oil and other fossil fuels, which contribute to our already warming planet. Once at the factory, the production of plastics often leaches dangerous chemicals into the communities surrounding the plants. For example, in Point Comfort, Texas, Formosa plastics settled after it was found to have released plastic pellets and other dangerous chemicals into the environment and in violation of the Clean Water Act. <sup>2</sup> **Industrial pollution is a danger to human and environmental health, and most often disproportionately harms people living in poverty.**

Not only do plastics create all sorts of hazards in their production, but they also do not biodegrade. That is, when they do eventually break down in landfills hundreds of years from now, they break down by photodegradation into microplastics that end up in our soil, our rivers, and our precious Kansas wildlife.

### **Plastic bag recycling is not widely used and does not mitigate other harms**

Lastly, the recycling rate for plastic bags, sacks, and wraps was 10% in 2018 according to the EPA. <sup>3</sup> While this is better than not at all, it is insufficient to solve the many harms to persons and wildlife and fails to significantly reduce demand for new plastic bag production. Moreover, recycling cannot mitigate the harm caused by the initial production of the bag.

### **Conclusion**

Instead of using Home Rule as a political or ideological tool, common sense says that we ought to defer to what Kansans ultimately decided in 1961, that cities are the best place to recognize local needs and propose local solutions to their unique challenges.

We believe that we, and all people, ought to have the ability to make decisions locally about how we respond to the calling to be good stewards of God's creation. **Please vote against Senate Bill 47.**

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<sup>2</sup> <https://biologicaldiversity.org/w/news/press-releases/formosa-plastics-fined-29-million-for-endangering-public-workers-in-texas-2021-09-14/>

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.epa.gov/facts-and-figures-about-materials-waste-and-recycling/frequent-questions-regarding-epas-facts-and>