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On behalf of the Humane Society of the United States, Cape Wildlife Center, and our tens of thousands of supporters in the Commonwealth, I am writing to express our support for the restriction of single-use plastic bags.

The millions of tons of trash discarded in the Bay State every year impose lethal dangers to wildlife. While much of this garbage is hauled to landfills, a large amount makes its way into the natural environment.

Although exact figures are near impossible to attain, the Massachusetts Department of Transportation runs three volunteer programs that together removed about 98,000 bags of litter from Massachusetts highways and roadways in 2012. Beyond our highways, debris also clogs the oceans; the Ocean Conservancy's 2014 coastal cleanup in Massachusetts involved nearly 3,000 volunteers and removed more than 11 tons of debris. This ubiquitous trash provides an ample banquet for wild animals displaced into developed areas due to shrinking habitats. Unfortunately, the simple act of satisfying hunger pangs often ends in injury or death.

Plastic bags and other pieces of litter are also indirect killers. Plastic bags tossed from car windows can put curious animals in the path of oncoming vehicles. This roadside garbage can have a domino effect; for example, a billowing plastic bag may attract a curious prey animal, which may be hit by a car, which then puts predators and scavengers in harm's way.

The exact number of trash-related fatalities is anyone's guess but what is not conjecture is the array of terrestrial and marine species affected by it. Stranded whales, turtles, and dolphins have been found with plastic bags in their stomachs or dead from entanglement.

Perhaps the most famous case involved a pygmy sperm whale stranded off the New Jersey coast in 1993. Inky, as she was called, had 3 square feet of plastic clogging her stomach. She survived, but many do not. Cape Wildlife Center has treated many animals victimized by plastic bags and improperly-discarded trash.

Halting the proliferation of plastic bags will help protect our environment and wildlife. Thank you for your time and the opportunity to submit testimony.

Sincerely,

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