

Dem lawmakers seeking to ban foam polystyrene packaging for food and beverages

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Dem lawmakers are seeking cosponsors for legislation to ban the use of foam polystyrene packaging for food and beverages in certain situations.

Reps. Katrina Shankland of Stevens Point and Kristina Shelton of Green Bay, along with Sens. Chris Larson of Milwaukee and Jeff Smith of Brunswick, are circulating a cosponsorship memo for the bill. It would prohibit retail food businesses from serving food and beverages in foam polystyrene packaging with some exceptions, according to the Legislative Reference Bureau analysis.

The lawmakers reference an EPA estimate showing Americans throw away about 25 billion polystyrene foam coffee cups per year — or about 80 Styrofoam cups per person. Because this material isn't biodegradable, it remains in the environment for hundreds of years. Plus, this foam also contains toxic chemicals including benzene and styrene, according to the CDC.

The bill's goal is to phase out polystyrene foam products in Wisconsin within a year, the memo shows. If the effort is successful, the state would join eight others that have passed similar laws: Maryland, Maine, Vermont, New York, New Jersey, Colorado, Virginia, and Washington, per the memo.

"We need cleaner alternatives to help us reduce the total amount of polystyrene foam clogging up our landfills for centuries at a time ... We're not just what we eat, but what we eat out of. By reducing our state's dependence on polystyrene foam, we can improve public health while protecting the environment," the lawmakers wrote.

LRB highlights two exceptions in its analysis, noting the ban wouldn't apply to food and beverage containers that were filled and sealed outside of Wisconsin, or to those used for packaging raw meat, poultry, fish, or seafood for consumption elsewhere.

Plus, DATCP could grant a waiver for up to one year after the bill would take effect to a food retailer, LRB notes. That would only be allowed if “necessary to avoid an undue hardship or practical difficulty for a retail food business operator” that’s not common among similar businesses.

The cosponsorship deadline is 4 p.m. Friday.

See the memo:

<https://www.wisconsinlobbyists.com/resources/Co-Sponsorship%20Memos/4.28.2023/LRB-0905%20prohibiting%20food%20and%20beverages%20from%20being%20saved%20in%20foam%20polystyrene%20packaging%20Memo.pdf>

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