

Plastic bag manufacturers file second Calif. measure

By Associated Press

Plastic bag manufacturers filed a second ballot measure on Friday in California's fight over a statewide plastic bag ban.

The American Progressive Bag Alliance, which represents bag manufacturers, proposed an initiative that would require bag fees estimated at more than \$400 million a year go into an environmental fund rather than be kept by grocers.

California's first-in-the-nation state ban on plastic shopping bags was put on hold this year when the trade group placed the issue before voters on the November 2016 ballot.

If voters uphold the ban, grocers will be allowed to charge a fee of at least 10 cents for using paper bags.

Under the new initiative, voters will be asked to direct those fees from grocers and retailers into an environmental protection fund.

"While we are confident California voters will reject the statewide bag ban scam at the ballot in 2016, we know that 84 percent of people believe that bag fees in general should go to a public purpose, instead of increasing profit margins for grocers," said Lee Califf, executive director of the plastic bag alliance.

Supporters of the ban have criticized manufacturers for spending millions on the referendum campaign to continue selling single-use plastic bags. A message left with Californians vs. Big Plastic, a coalition of environmental, labor and business groups supporting the plastic bag ban, wasn't immediately returned Friday afternoon.

Gov. Jerry Brown signed the bag ban after one of the fiercest legislative battles of 2014, pitting bag-makers against environmentalists. It was scheduled to be phased in starting in July at large grocery stores and supermarkets as a way to cut down on litter and protect marine life.

The bag alliance said the ban will cost manufacturing jobs and boost profits for grocers, who can charge customers a premium for bags now given away for free.

Environmental activists have successfully pushed plastic bag bans in cities across the U.S., including Chicago, Seattle and Austin, Texas. Hawaii also is on track to have a de facto statewide ban, with all counties approving prohibitions.

More than 100 cities and counties in California, including Los Angeles and San Francisco, already have such bans. Several other California local governments plan to move forward with their own bans as a result of the referendum, including San Diego, Santa Barbara County, Sacramento, Oceanside and American Canyon.