Purpose: Enacts the "Packaging Reduction and Recycling Infrastructure Act" to require companies selling, offering for sale, or distributing covered packaging materials and products to reduce consumer packaging, improve recycling and recycling infrastructure, including supporting reusable and refill infrastructure, financially support municipal recycling programs, reduce toxins in packaging and require producers of products to bear the onus for end of life solutions to product packaging.

Statement of Support: As Americans we are drowning in our own packaging waste. Of the quarter of a billion tons of municipal solid waste generated every year in this country, nearly a third of it is just packaging and paper products. Only about 35% of this waste is recycled, leaving the rest to go to incinerators, landfills and uncaptured litter. Currently, manufacturers are not responsible for recovering or recycling their products and have little incentive to reduce the packaging of those products. Instead, municipalities bear the brunt of handling the collection, transportation, sorting, and processing of waste — materials which they had no control or influence over in the first place. Many municipalities struggle with the burden of recycling, and will continue to struggle following China’s recent and significant restrictions on the recyclables it will accept. As a result of increased recycling costs, municipalities are faced with the decision to either increase taxes or significantly limit what materials they can accept. Meanwhile, manufacturers continue to exacerbate the global waste crisis because there is no mandate to reduce the amount of packaging they use nor is there any incentive to transition to materials that are easier to recycle.

To prevent more waste from ending up in landfills, the recycling market must shift the “end-of-life” responsibility of materials from municipalities to the producers of that waste, by creating a producer responsibility program for paper products and packaging materials. Under this type of program, producers will finance the recycling of their products, be rewarded for creating easily recyclable products, and use higher percentages of post-consumer recycled material. The Sierra Club Atlantic Chapter fully supports S.4246/A.5322 and specifically wants to highlight these important planks of the policy:

- Addresses the issue of toxic chemicals in packaging materials. S.4246/A.5322 includes legal provisions that mandate the elimination of toxic chemicals from the materials used for packaging. To create a truly circular economy, with a sustainable life cycle of products, we have to ensure that the materials we are putting back into the reusable/recyclable stream do not contain toxic chemicals. By eliminating chemicals that are carcinogens, mutagens, reproductive toxicants, immunotoxins,
neurotoxicants, or endocrine disruptors from the wastestream, we will be ensuring the reuse and recycling of materials will be much more sustainable.

- Fixes and expands statewide recycling by holding producers responsible and ensuring that our municipal recycling centers have financing mechanisms in place to build self-sustaining programs (including appropriately set fees and eco-modulation of waste products, i.e. penalizing the use of materials that are toxic or difficult to recycle, and rewarding the use of those which are better for the environment.)
- Implements strong waste and plastic reduction requirements that support eliminating packaging and promote reuse/refill options.
- Sets clear targets, goals, and standards for recyclability, post-consumer content, and reuse/refill in the legislation. The Sierra Club believes these targets and goals should not be left to be determined through regulation or left up to the Producer Responsibility Organization (PRO).
- Clearly defines what constitutes recycling. S.4246/A.5322 makes sure that the program doesn’t include incineration, chemical recycling or other false solutions, and does not interfere with current beverage container laws.
- Increases accountability and transparency for the PRO. This is done through the creation of an Inspector General to assist with oversight and enforcement funded through PRO registration fees, in addition to an advisory board.

Waste reduction and recycling programs for paper and packaging are common throughout the world, and have shown great success in Canada and Europe. In Europe, where these types of programs have been established for decades, some countries have reached packaging and paper products recycling rates as high as 80%, compared to a maximum of 50% in parts of the United States. The programs have increased recycling rates and reduced methane emissions by limiting the waste that goes into landfills. This comprehensive waste reduction policy (S.4246/A.5322) outlines how New York can reduce some of the worst environmental contaminants from our landfills without an additional burden on taxpayers, and continue to lead the nation in plastic and waste pollution reduction.

The Sierra Club Atlantic Chapter Strongly Urges Your Support of S.4246/A.5322