

United States Senate  
WASHINGTON, DC 20510

January 25, 2021

Mr. Jeff Bezos  
Chief Executive Officer  
Amazon  
410 Terry Ave N  
Seattle, WA 98109

Dear Mr. Bezos,

As consumers purchase more goods online, the demand for plastic packaging needed to ship these goods has increased. In the past few years, we have started to understand the negative impacts of plastics on our environment, ecosystems, and wildlife. Given your positions as one of the largest online retailers, we ask that you consider reducing the amount of plastic used in your packaging.

Due to the pandemic, consumers turned to online shopping to purchase more goods than ever before. In 2020, online shopping or e-commerce was already projected to increase its share of retail sales, but the pandemic has accelerated that growth. According to one media investment company, e-commerce will amount to \$3.9 trillion, 17 percent of total global retail sales for 2020. This trend is expected to continue with e-commerce projected to make up 25 percent of all retail sales in the next four years.

Consumers expect the products they purchase online to arrive in the same condition as they would find at brick and mortar stores. To meet that need, your company carefully packages products with protective materials including plastic bag mailers or cardboard filled with bubble wrap, plastic pillows, or other forms of plastic packaging. In 2019, e-commerce used over 2 billion pounds of plastic for packaging. As online retail sales continue to grow, the amount of plastic packaging will continue to grow. By 2025, it is expected that over 4.5 billion pounds of plastic packaging will be used will be used.<sup>1</sup>

Consumers receiving packages containing plastic often want to recycle them. However, these packaging plastics, known as plastic film, are rarely accepted in curbside recycle bins. Due to the low value of recycling plastic film, only four percent is recycled, the majority of the plastic packaging that your company is sending will end up incinerated or landfilled.<sup>2</sup> Many consumers, unaware they are not accepted by their curbside program, “wishfully recycle” them though their curbside program. This “wishful recycling” contaminates recycling streams and can cause other recyclable items in the stream to be landfilled. Although these packaging products can be taken

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<sup>1</sup> Oceana Report: *Amazon's Plastic Problem Revealed*. <https://plastics.oceana.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/Amazons-Plastic-Problem-Revealed-December-15-2020-Oceana.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> RSE USA (2017) The Closed Loop Foundation. *Film Recycling Investment Report*. Available: <https://www.closedlooppartners.com/foundation-articles/investment-opportunities-in-film-plastic-recycling/>.

to drop off locations to be recycled—including most grocery stores—most consumers are unwilling or unable to take that additional step.

We are concerned that the plastic packaging that your company is producing will contribute to the world's growing plastic pollution problem. According to National Geographic, plastic packaging makes up almost half of the plastic waste produced globally. Scientists are unsure of how long it will take this plastic to break down to its constituent molecules, but estimates are upwards of 450 years or more. That plastic poses a serious threat to our waterways and oceans. Each year over 8 million tons of plastic waste ends up in our oceans, adding to the 150 million tons already built up.<sup>3</sup> Our freshwater resources are also threatened, each year 22 million pounds of plastic waste ends up in the Great Lakes waterway system.<sup>4</sup> This waste kills millions of marine animals and affects many more. It impacts our drinking water and our communities; it is a threat that cannot wait to be addressed.

Given your role as a leader in the e-commerce world, please answer the following questions:

1. What specific steps are you taking to reduce plastic packaging materials used by your company?
2. Will you commit to self-reporting and publicizing data on the total plastic waste your company produces?
3. What steps are you taking to increase the total recyclable content in your products?
4. Are you considering moving towards packaging that could be easily recycled in a curbside bin, including type #1 and #2 plastics?
5. Do you offer your customers alternatives to plastic products? If yes, please explain how customers can choose alternatives. If no, when do you plan to do so?
6. How are you ensuring proper disposal and recycling of your products downstream?
7. Are you investing in research to find alternatives to plastic packaging?

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<sup>3</sup> World Economic Forum The New Plastics Economy Rethinking the Future of plastics (2016)

<sup>4</sup> Inventory and transport of plastic debris in the Laurentian Great Lakes. *Marine Pollution Bulletin*. Matthew J.Hoffman Eric Hittinger. <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S0025326X1630981X>

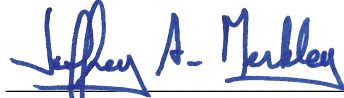
It is clear that plastics pose a serious threat to our world and wildlife. I look forward to hearing what steps your company is taking to reduce your plastic footprint. Thank you for your time, and I look forward to hearing your response.

Sincerely,



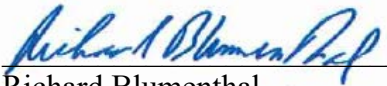
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Richard J. Durbin  
United States Senator



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Jeffery A. Merkley  
United States Senator



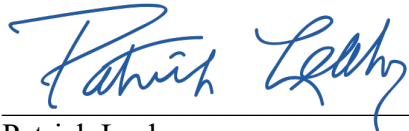
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Richard Blumenthal  
United States Senator



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Cory A. Booker  
United States Senator



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Patrick Leahy  
United States Senator



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Ron Wyden  
United States Senator