Next week, I'll be in Washington, D.C. with the Surfrider Foundation and two of our fabulous Frank G. Wells Environmental Law Clinic students, Charoula Melliou and Divya Rao, to brief Congress on harms caused by marine plastic pollution and steps the federal government can take to combat the problem.

Plastic pollution is a serious issue, and one you may have seen in the news recently: just last week, a floating boom intended to rake up debris from the Great Pacific Garbage Patch returned to port in pieces. There are trillions of pieces of plastic debris in the oceans, and over 700 species—including 84% of sea turtle species—have been impacted. Marine wildlife can mistake plastic debris for food, and necropsies of birds, sea turtles, and whales have shown stomachs full to the brim with plastics, causing death by choking or starvation.

This significant harm to the environment is just part of the problem: microplastics have infiltrated our diet through commonly-eaten foods like fish and even table salt. Ingestion of the toxic chemicals in plastic, like BPA, has been linked to health problems including infertility and cancer. And American consumption of single-use plastic items like plastic bags, straws, stirrers, and Styrofoam products has created a waste management crisis. We generate far too much plastic waste to be processed by recycling facilities in the United States, and the Asian countries to which we've historically exported our plastic waste are now closing their doors due to the human health impacts and contamination of natural resources caused by the waste management industry. Municipalities in the United States spend billions of dollars a year attempting to clean up and manage plastic waste.

We'll be most effective in reducing plastic pollution if we act to stop it at the source by changing consumer behavior, instead of waiting to address plastics when they're already in the waste stream. While efforts to recycle single-use plastics are certainly admirable, they won't solve this crisis. Less than 10% of plastic waste is recycled, and it's costly and impractical to recycle certain kinds of plastic waste, like single-use plastic bags.

That's why we're advocating for a policy that has proven effective both in the United States and abroad: imposition of a fee on all single-use bags (both paper and plastic, so as not to shift environmental burdens) at their point-of-sale. Local governments across the United States have already implemented these kinds of fees, some in conjunction with outright bans on single-use plastic bags, to great effect. Jurisdictions that have imposed such fees have seen a staggering reduction—between 70 and 85%—in single-use plastic bag consumption. In so

doing, they've avoided significant waste management costs, and some have even been able to devote fee-generated revenue to waterway cleanup. We're also advocating for the kind of straw-by-request laws that have seen success in California and elsewhere.

Federal action could build on local successes and protect them from ongoing efforts in some states to strip local governments of the power to adopt plastic waste reduction measures. And while some large corporations, like Starbucks, are already taking voluntary steps to eliminate or reduce consumption of some single-use plastics, federal action would even the playing field by imposing requirements across the board.

We're looking forward to sharing our research, which surveys approaches to reducing marine plastic pollution in the United States and internationally, and our recommendations based on that research, with Congress next week. You can read more about our research and findings here.