

I'm Betsy Martin, President of the Friends of Little Hunting Creek. I've been coordinating annual cleanups of Little Hunting Creek since 2002. Every year we remove a dozen or more shopping carts, and several years ago, well over 100 Walmart carts were hauled out.

Calls and letters to Walmart and COSTCO have been to no avail. They haven't answered our pleas for help or taken steps that solve the problem.

It's a more consequential problem than you may realize, because abandoned shopping carts degrade the social environment as well as the natural environment.

When people observe that social norms are being violated, they're more likely to do the same. So, for example, one study found that when shopping carts were strewn about in a parking garage (versus being in the cart return area), people were more likely to litter. The researchers put flyers under car windshields, and then watched what people did when they returned to their cars. When shopping carts were scattered around, 58% of people littered—tossed the flier on the ground—compared to 30% when the shopping carts were where they belong<sup>1</sup>. Subtle, small infractions beget more and bigger ones. Litter and abandoned shopping carts set the stage for crime.

The positive flip side of this is that cleaning up the litter and abandoned shopping carts can reduce antisocial behavior. In a study in Philadelphia, vacant lots were randomly assigned to one of three treatments: the lot was planted by local garden clubs; or it was simply mowed and the trash cleaned up; or nothing was done. The experiment continued for a year, with the result that firearm shootings declined significantly—by nearly 10 percentage points—near lots that had been gardened or cleaned up, but didn't change otherwise.<sup>2</sup>

So there's more at stake here than keeping shopping carts out of a creek. It's also about restoring and maintaining the social order. You can call it a gun violence prevention bill if you like.

Nobody wants to live in an area that's filled with litter and trash, and nobody should have to. Businesses aren't likely to want to locate there. Every year when we scout the area in advance of our cleanup, it looks like a third world country because of all the trash—in Fairfax County, the second richest county in the country.

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<sup>1</sup> K. Keizer, S. Lindenberg, L. Steg. "The Spreading of Disorder," *Science* 12 Dec 2008: Vol. 322, Issue 5908, pp. 1681-1685. <http://science.sciencemag.org/content/322/5908/1681>

<sup>2</sup> R. Moyer, J. M. MacDonald, G. Ridgeway, C. C. Branas, "Effect of Remediating Blighted Vacant Land on Shootings: A Citywide Cluster Randomized Trial", *American Journal of Public Health* 109, no. 1 (January 1, 2019): pp. 140-144. <https://ajph.aphapublications.org/doi/abs/10.2105/AJPH.2018.304752>

SB 1553 seems fair and not too burdensome. The retailer gets a notice a cart has been found and has 7 days to pick it up. Only when he doesn't retrieve it is it declared abandoned property and the owner charged for removal and disposal. There are similar or tougher laws in Virginia Beach and many towns in California, Oregon, Washington, New York, and elsewhere. The shopping carts we find come from big box stores that operate nationally. If they've figured out how to control their shopping carts in these other towns, they can do it in Fairfax County.

It's in the interests of commercial businesses to address the problem. Retailers are part of the community—surely they are willing to do their part to clean up this depressed area, reduce crime, and revitalize the Richmond Highway corridor, all of which will ultimately help their businesses.

Please support SB1553. Fairfax County needs tools to prevent the scourge of abandoned shopping carts and litter that degrades too many parts of our county.

One last reason to support it: If you pass this bill, you will join Senator Surovell in our pantheon of heroes—you too will receive the singular honor, already bestowed on him in 2015, of being named **Trash-Talking Legislator of the Year** by the Friends of Little Hunting Creek.