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Testimony before the Energy and Technology Committee

Tuesday, February 26th, 2008

RM 2D,

10.00 AM

Good morning/afternoon Senator Fonfara, Representative Fontana and members of this Committee. My name is Frank Sykes and I am the Legislative Analyst with the African-American Affairs Commission (AAAC). The Commission is an independent, non-partisan state agency committed to advocating on behalf of the African-American community. The Commission also partners with the Connecticut Coalition for Environmental Justice a group of organizations committed to improving the environment we live in. Today I m speaking in support of

Senate Bill 118 – *AN ACT CONCERNING ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE.*

Over the years our Commission has been an advocate for cleaner environments recognizing that there is a strong correlation between the environment and the quality of our health. It is a fact that nationally 3 out of 5 African and Latino Americans live in communities with abandoned waste sites.¹ In our state today residents in urban communities bear a disproportionate number of pollution producing facilities. Here in Connecticut 71 towns have been identified as towns that are environmentally stressed meaning these towns have 3 or more pollution facilities within a one mile radius.² It is also a fact that residents in urban communities tend to suffer from a variety of respiratory illnesses most commonly associated with environmental hazards. For instance hospitalization rates for asthma in the state are much higher for African-Americans and as a group are twice likely to die from asthma than whites.³ Similar outcomes are reported for lung cancer where studies show higher lung cancer rates in cities with higher levels of pollution.

In view of these disparities it is the hope that this legislation if enacted should provide at least a process whereby residents of overburdened communities have an opportunity to work with designated state agencies to control pollution in their neighborhoods. Involving impacted communities in environmental decision making is key in achieving equity and fairness. Secondly it should establish a provision whereby towns have the ability to negotiate environmental benefits. Finally it should strengthen the enforcement of environment laws for existing environmental affecting facilities. In summary environmental justice as mentioned in this bill means that no group of people in our state should bear a disproportionate share of the negative environmental consequences regardless of race, income, culture and social class.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify.

¹ Commission for Racial Justice

² Capitol Regional Council of Governments, *Environmentally Stressed Communities*

³ Connecticut Department of Public Health, *Asthma Prevalence in Connecticut 2005. A Surveillance Report*