



February 2, 2009

TESTIMONY BEFORE THE CONNECTICUT GENERAL ASSEMBLY
JOINT ENVIRONMENT COMMITTEE
ON PLASTIC BAG BILLS HB 5207, HB 5215, HB 5466, HB 5492

Honorable Members of the Joint Environment Committee:

I am here today on behalf of the Progressive Bag Affiliates of the American Chemistry Council. The PBA is an industry group representing plastic bag manufacturers, plastic resin producers, and plastics recyclers. We appreciate having the opportunity to address you today on the various proposals pertaining to plastic bags that are on the agenda.

We all share the goal of an improved environment through eliminating litter and reducing waste. And while there are many possible approaches to achieving these goals, there is currently no single "silver bullet." This is because each type of material (plastic, paper, *and* reusable) has their own unique environmental footprint, and each material choice involves a variety of environmental impacts. For example, studies on plastic grocery bags show that they have less environmental impacts than alternatives: plastic bags generate half the greenhouse gas emissions, require 70 percent less energy to produce, and generate 80 percent less waste than paper alternatives.¹

We understand and support the Legislature's desire to reduce environmental impacts of litter and waste. However, three out of the four proposals on the agenda could actually cause more harm to the environment, and in the case of the tax proposals, only serve to further hurt the State's struggling economy by potentially eliminating more jobs—specifically among Connecticut's plastic and paper bag manufacturers and distributors.

In the case of the legislation to prohibit the use of plastic bags, a ban is an extreme approach with unintended environmental and economic consequences that outweigh any benefits sought. A tax would also have adverse environmental and economic consequences. Therefore, we cannot support either **HB 5207** or **HB 5215**.

More States and Local Governments Seeking To Increase Recycling

Our industry supports a "reduce, reuse and recycle" approach to managing bag waste. And, based on our experience, we have learned that *recycling* is the most effective and appropriate environmentally sustainable solution for bags. Subsequently, of the four proposals on the agenda, ACC supports **HB 5466**, which requires the recycling of plastic bags at retail stores on a statewide basis. And it would accomplish this without imposing a punitive tax. Unfortunately, we can not support **HB 5492** for two reasons:

- First, while **HB 5492** requires retail stores to recycle plastic bags, it would additionally mandate a twenty-cent fee on the bags to discourage people from using them. Such a fee would drastically diminish the supply of plastic bags available for recycling, making it more difficult for companies that make valuable new products from recycled plastic bags to obtain a predictable supply of recovered material.

¹ Boustead Consulting, "Life Cycle Assessment for Three Types of Grocery Bags - Recyclable Plastic; Compostable, Biodegradable Plastic; and Recycled, Recyclable Paper," 2007.

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- Recycling and taxes are *not* complementary, they are mutually exclusive. This is because the one (tax) directly has a negative impact on the other (recycling).

We also want to ask the Committee: at a time of rising unemployment, when working families are struggling to pay their bills, why would the State actually consider imposing an additional tax on hardworking Connecticut families when they can least afford any new costs? Taxing carryout bags would only add to Connecticut families food bills, worsening their economic burden..

We also wanted to point out that most other US municipalities that have considered taxing bags have rejected this idea. The bag tax in Ireland is often touted as a success story in reducing plastic grocery bags by 90% in that country. What you *don't* hear is that while it is true that the amount of plastic carryout bags dropped significantly, the purchase of plastic trash can liners dramatically increased by 400% because Irish shoppers switched to buying those instead to replace the free carryout bags they once used for this purpose.. Reports by the Irish national government have shown an actual increase in the amount of plastic bags going into their landfills following the imposing of the tax.

Taxes and bans on plastic bags don't make sense for the environment. The overwhelming majority of states and cities that have looked at this issue have concluded that recycling is the sound solution for reducing waste and controlling litter. Both cities and states—from Austin to California, New York, and Rhode Island—are moving to plastic bag recycling as the practical environmental solution. In the United States, plastic bag and film recycling increased by 24 percent in 2006, reaching a record high of 812 million pounds.

Partnerships Are Needed

Reducing litter, increasing recycling, and improving the overall environmental landscape is a complex undertaking that requires the active participation and collaboration between government, industry, non-profit groups, and consumers. Education and awareness—not bans or punitive taxes—are the keys to successful litter prevention and increased recycling rates.

ACC has been instrumental in developing public education materials to help consumers identify convenient plastic bag and film recycling opportunities. For example, we have developed the most comprehensive on-line database of local plastic bag recycling opportunities that is available free of charge to the general public. This information is available at www.PlasticBagRecycling.org.

PBA partnered with states and localities, the grocers and retail merchants, recyclers, and other interested stakeholders to help develop systems that effectively and efficiently help to recycle plastic bags and other kinds of plastic film. We are understanding a new initiative that will be announced shortly to increase bags recycling and would welcome the opportunity to partner with the State of Connecticut on this effort.

Sincerely,



Stephen Rosario
Director, Northeast Region