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Environmental Committee Testimony  
By Stan Sorkin, President  
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Monday, February 2, 2009

Testimony Regarding HB No.5466, 5492, 5207, and 5215

Good afternoon, Chairman Roy, Chairman Meyer and Members of the Environmental Committee. My name is Stan Sorkin, President of the Connecticut Food Association. Our Association provides policy advice, research, legislative and regulatory services to the grocery industry in the state. Our Association understands the leadership role our members must play in creating public awareness and adopting programs that can generate environmental benefits. Working together with all stakeholders, we believe that a workable solution to the checkout bag issue can be found that will achieve environmental benefits, maintain financial viability for manufacturers and retailers, and avoid increased costs associated with food shopping for consumers, especially in today's economic climate.

Since I last testified before this committee last March, our members have intensified their efforts to convert consumers to using reusable checkout bags. We have created a "REACT: Bring Your Own Bag" in-store marketing campaign which reminds consumers to save planet earth by using reusable bags and pays them a nickel a bag for using them at checkout. Grocery stores have placed dedicated plastic bag recycle bins in entranceways and established a system with wholesalers to return the bags to a central location for recycling. Recycled plastic bags are being used as components in low-maintenance composite building materials such as decking, fencing materials, park benches-true alternatives to wood, reducing pressure on this resource. This program has been successful and has been the model for mandatory plastic bag recycling laws in states such as New York. Rewarding people to change behavior works. We are in the process of compiling industry numbers which would document the success but based on a sample, I am estimating that 1.1 million reusable bags were sold in CT in 2008. A program of this type should be considered before taxing checkout bags and taking money out of consumers' pockets which could better be spent on food.

Let's take a closer look at the tax alternatives. As you are aware, both paper and plastic bags have negative environmental consequences and the solution is to convert consumers to reusable bags. If you believe that taxing the consumer in today's economic climate is good policy, then tax both paper and plastic bags. Taxing only plastic checkout bags would cause consumers simply to request paper bags. The switch to paper bags would add an estimated \$22 million in cost to the state's grocery industry, be passed onto the consumer, and not change consumer behavior. Taxing both paper and plastic bags would definitely stimulate the use of reusable bags. It would help reduce a grocer's supply costs but increase the costs associated with processing a

customer's order at checkout. As the tax collector for the state, the retailer should be compensated for this function. Again, with people's budgets strapped and more people on food stamps, is taxing checkout bags good public policy? If you believe it is, then a tax on both paper and plastic checkout bags works.

Any legislation adopted should be statewide and preempt local laws and ordinances concerning checkout bags and include all retail outlets.