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Written Testimony of Christopher Phelps
Environment Connecticut Program Director
Supporting House Bill 5440, An Act Concerning An Electric Vehicle Infrastructure

Before the Connecticut General Assembly Commerce Committee
Tuesday, March 9, 2010

Senator LeBeau, Representative Berger, and members of the Committee:

On behalf of Environment Connecticut, I am submitting this testimony supporting HB 5440. Environment Connecticut is a statewide, member-supported non-profit environmental advocacy organization.

Environment Connecticut strongly supports efforts to accelerate the use of electric vehicles in Connecticut. Electric vehicles have the potential to dramatically cut emissions of global warming pollution from vehicles, improve air quality, and significantly cut per-mile fuel costs for the average driver. Aligning Connecticut's public policies to incentivize preparation of necessary electric vehicle charging infrastructure and to support consumer adoption of electric vehicles can provide tremendous benefits to both our environmental and economic future.

We urge the committee to approve this legislation and respectfully offer these comments for your consideration:

Section 2: While we support measures to reward and incentivize consumer use of electric and other clean cars, we believe the language in this section would produce unintended adverse results. First, in lines 18 – 19, the bill appears to inappropriately exclude purely electric vehicles from the incentive for using high occupancy vehicle (HOV) lanes. (By limiting that incentive to a vehicle that “draws acceleration energy from two onboard sources of stored energy.” – Purely electric plug-in vehicles would not meet this definition.) Second, in lines 22 – 23 the language appears to extend the right of unrestricted use of HOV lanes to vehicles that meet the California LEV II “Clean Car” standard. Subsequent to passage of Connecticut’s Clean Cars law in 2004, all new cars sold in this state meet the LEV II standard. Therefore, this provision would effectively allow unrestricted HOV lane usage for *all* new cars and light trucks.

Environment Connecticut respectfully suggests that the committee amend Sec. 2 to clarify that the HOV exemption be limited exclusively to cars and light trucks utilizing an electric motor alone, or in conjunction with an internal combustion engine.

Section 4: Environment Connecticut supports the extension of the sales tax credit for purchase of high-efficiency vehicles that would otherwise sunset in July of this year.

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However, we also recognize that the state faces an extremely challenging budget crisis and that the loss of revenue associated with this exemption may preclude its extension. Additionally, it should be acknowledged that consumer demand for high-efficiency vehicles is quite high and unlikely to diminish in the near future. Finally, the federal government is currently implementing increased fuel economy standards that will have the effect of significantly increasing fleet-wide efficiency of all cars and light trucks sold in coming years.

Therefore, we respectfully suggest the following alternative to extending the existing sales tax exemption: Delete lines 38 and 39 in their entirety and replace them with "is a plug-in electric or plug-in hybrid electric vehicle." This change would have the effect of significantly reducing the revenue loss to the state from this tax exemption, while also creating a sales tax exemption encouraging consumer adoption of the first generation of high-efficiency plug-in vehicles due to arrive in the market place over the next 2 years.

For further discussion and analysis of plug-in electric vehicles, I wish to refer the committee members to a recent report released by our national federation. The report, "Plug-In Cars: Powering America Toward a Cleaner Future" is available at www.EnvironmentConnecticut.org.

Thank you for your consideration of this testimony. Environment Connecticut urges the committee to approve HB 5440.

Sincerely,
Christopher Phelps
Program Director
Environment Connecticut