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*TESTIMONY OF
ATTORNEY GENERAL RICHARD BLUMENTHAL
BEFORE THE ENVIRONMENT COMMITTEE
MARCH 8, 2010*

I appreciate the opportunity to comment on Senate Bill 126, An Act Adding Wood Smoke to the Public Health Nuisance Code and Concerning Outdoor Wood-Burning Furnaces.

I have discussed this issue with farmers and wood furnace industry representatives as well as public health and environmental advocates and experts, and people adversely affected by wood smoke. I believe that we can achieve a reasonable consensus approach that addresses all interests. I will work with your committee and its members and staff along with everyone interested in this significant issue to reach a sensible solution.

As one step, I will help the Department of Public Health to provide local health directors with more information about possible misguided uses, and methods to more effectively and efficiently investigate complaints. Many local health directors are overworked and understaffed as a result of fiscal and budget pressures. The state should assist local health directors with critical information helpful to providing adequate relief.

Wood has been used for centuries for fuel and comfort, particularly in Connecticut and New England, where it is integral to our culture and tradition. It is a renewable and plentiful source of energy that reduces our dependence on foreign oil and other fuel sources. Connecticut farmers commonly use wood burning furnaces, and many others rely on logging revenue. Furnaces are sold and maintained by local businesses that contribute to Connecticut's economy.

I am also mindful of environmental and health studies raising credible concerns. The results of such studies show the critical importance of potential problems involving improper use or equipment emissions, as well as performance standards and vigorous enforcement. Low efficiency, incomplete wood combustion, and similar issues can lead to small particulate emissions and respiratory problems. The causes and solutions merit prompt and careful consideration.

I hope to assist the Committee in bringing together all interests and seeking consensus. Some legislative action seems clearly appropriate and advisable.

I look forward to working with the committee on this important health and environmental issue.