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Written Testimony of Christopher Phelps, Program Director
Before the Connecticut General Assembly Commerce Committee

February 24, 2011

Written testimony **opposing** SB 1019, An Act Expediting The State Permitting Process

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

Thank you for the opportunity to offer this testimony opposing SB 1019. Environment Connecticut is a member-supported non-profit environmental advocacy organization. We oppose SB 1019 because it would appear to allow for automatic approval of permit applications before the Department of Environmental Protection after 45 days regardless of whether or not approval is in the public interest.

In 2010, similarly outrageous proposals allowing polluters to do an end-run around the environmental permitting process were rejected by the General Assembly. Instead, compromise legislation – supported by both environmental and business advocates – was signed into law. That legislation would prioritize permitting for certain job-creating projects. Additionally, DEP was directed to issue an analysis of what it would take to meet a 180 day time limit for permitting approval generally.

When DEP issued its Permitting Assessment Report in September, 2010, it identified the need for dozens of new employees in order to be able to consistently meet such expectations for permitting approval. This conclusion should come as no shock to the members of this committee or to any member of the General Assembly. DEP has been understaffed for decades, resulting in not only permitting backlogs, but lapses in enforcement as well. Unfortunately, given the current budget crisis the state faces there is no realistic expectation that this understaffing problem will be corrected anytime soon.

Given these circumstances, the provisions of SB 1019 requiring 45-day automatic permit approval are simply outrageous. This would effectively eviscerate Connecticut's laws protecting the quality of the air we breathe, the water we drink, and the quality of life for our families.

On behalf of Environment Connecticut's statewide membership, I urge you to reject SB 1019. This bill is a direct assault on our environment allowing polluters to freely foul the air we breathe, the water we drink and despoil our natural landscape.

Sincerely,

Christopher Phelps
Program Director
Environment Connecticut