

**CITIZENS
CAMPAIGN**
FOR THE ENVIRONMENT



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Empowering Communities. Advocating Solutions.

SB No. 58

**AN ACT ESTABLISHING A FEE FOR THE USE OF PLASTIC AND PAPER BAGS
AT GROCERY AND RETAIL ESTABLISHMENTS**

Comments by Citizens Campaign for the Environment

February 9, 2011

Senator Meyer, members of the committee, thank you for the opportunity to speak today.

My name is Louis Burch, program coordinator for Citizens Campaign for the Environment (CCE). Supported by over 80,000 members in Connecticut and New York State, CCE empowers communities and advocates solutions to protect our public health and our shared environment. CCE believes that single-use disposable bags are environmentally harmful, and unnecessary.

CCE strongly supports the State of Connecticut adopting legislation to institute a fee on single use shopping bags at grocery stores and retail outlets statewide. The fee will help reduce pollution from single-use bags, which litter our beaches, clog our streams and waterways, and endanger our wildlife.

CCE believes the disposable bag fee is an important initiative and encourages using the funds to benefit existing recycling initiatives.

This is a growing nationwide movement in several states and municipalities with several other states and municipalities to do away with this wasteful habit. In January of 2010, Washington D.C. instituted a .05 cent fee on plastic bags at all grocery and retail outlets. Officials estimate that Washington, D.C. saw an 80% reduction in disposable bag use and raised approximately \$2 million for river clean-up from the fees.

Disposable bags are not free. Giving away disposable bags fails to account for the costs borne at many levels. Retailers pay for the bags, and then pass those costs onto consumers. Shopping bags are unsustainably produced with fossil fuels. And finally, communities pay for disposable bags that clog storm drains and litter roadways.

Disposable bag pollution costs even more with its impact on our wildlife and natural environment. As you may already know about the dangers plastic bags pose to our aquatic life. These bags are mistaken for jellyfish and consumed by sea turtles, starving these already endangered creatures. They become tangled around the necks of birds, fish,

and dolphins, strangling them to death. Plastic pollution is conveyed by ocean currents and have concentrated into the Great Pacific Garbage patch- an island of plastic the size of Texas. Ocean currents transport debris from all over the world and deposit it in huge gyres, causing the problem to grow exponentially. Experts now say that there is more plastic in our oceans than plankton, and it's only getting worse. Plastic never goes away, instead it "photo degrades" and breaks into smaller pieces that look just like food to aquatic animals.

In Connecticut, many of our waterways flow directly to the Long Island Sound, which contributes over \$8 Billion annually to our regional economy. Science now points to exposure to plastics and other toxic materials as a major contributor to the failure of our lobster fisheries,¹ which once were a staple of our maritime economy.

Ending the give-away of shopping bags is a common-sense effort that creates an economic incentive to change consumer behavior. Adopting a fee on disposable check out bags promotes reusable bags and inspires positive change in retailer and consumer behavior to drastically reduce bag pollution. CCE is actively involved in the movement to promote reusable bag use in Fairfield County and statewide.

Reusable bags are readily available, hold twice as many items as conventional shopping bags, and do not break as easily. They can be washed and used for years instead of just one day or a few minutes.

Placing a fee on single-use bags is an important first step in promoting reusable bags and ending disposable bag pollution. The State of Connecticut now has an opportunity to stand out as a leader in sustainability, while protecting our precious marine resources, conserving fossil fuels, and reducing unsightly litter. CCE urges the CT General Assembly to adopt a statewide fee on disposable bags at the check-out.

I look forward to working with you on this issue, thank you.

Respectfully submitted,

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¹ According to Hans Laufer, a research professor in the Department of Molecular and Cellular Biology at the University of Connecticut