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Housatonic Resources Recovery Authority
Public Hearing Testimony
In Support of SB 205
An Act Requiring Certain Thermostat Manufacturers to Pay
Incentives for the Return of Mercury Thermostats

Co-Chairs Roy and Meyer, Ranking Members Chapin and Roraback, and members of the Environment Committee, thank you for the opportunity to present testimony in support of SB 205. The Housatonic Resources Recovery Authority administers solid waste, recycling and household hazardous waste contracts for 11 member municipalities including the City of Danbury and the Towns of Bethel, Bridgewater, Brookfield, Kent, New Fairfield, New Milford, Newtown, Redding, Ridgefield and Sherman. We respectfully ask for your consideration and support of SB 205.

While in 2006 our state banned the sale of thermostats that contain mercury, 1.7 million legacy mercury thermostats remain in Connecticut homes. Each day some of those thermostats are disposed of, replaced with more energy efficient programmable thermostats. But less than 5% of those find their way to local household hazardous waste collections or other environmentally appropriate disposal locations.

The public is very concerned about the mercury released when a compact fluorescent bulb (CFL) is broken. EPA has even issued a 3 page downloadable step by step instruction sheet in how to handle a broken CFL. But while so many people worry about the mercury release from a broken CFL, many don't think twice about throwing an old thermostat into their regular garbage to end up being burned in a waste to energy plant or buried in a landfill. To put things in perspective, the average CFL light bulb contains about 4 milligrams of mercury, while each mercury thermostat contains about 4 grams or 1000 times more mercury than those CFLs so many of us obsess about.

The legacy thermostats in Connecticut homes contain over 11,500 pounds of mercury. How toxic is that? A single gram of mercury is enough to contaminate all the fish in a 20-acre lake, making them unsafe to eat. Connecticut banned the sale of mercury containing thermostats because mercury exposure is unsafe for humans. Even low levels of mercury can damage the development and functioning of the nervous system in growing and in-utero children. Keeping mercury out of our soil, air and water is one of the most important things we can do to protect the environment as well as public health.

The current manufacturer stewardship program intended to capture a significant quantity of the legacy thermostats at their end of life has not proven to be effective in Connecticut. However, the five dollar incentive for consumers that is currently used in Vermont and Maine has proven to be quite effective, increasing the recovery rate for mercury thermostats by a factor of ten.

For all these reasons, your vote in favor of SB 205 would be a vote in favor of a cleaner environment and a healthier future for the people of the HRRRA region and the state. Thank you for your consideration.

Support Raised Bill 6262: Written Testimony submitted to the CGA Environment Committee Public Hearing- Monday March 7 2011.

Submitted By: Peter M. Orr, Fort Hill Farms, LLC, Thompson CT
Member: The Farmer's Cow, Very Alive, CFBA Dairy Committee, CT Milk Promotion Board

Please support House Bill 6262 – An Act Concerning the Community Investment Account (CIA). A core goal of this bill should be to remove the sunset provisions that would end the Agricultural Sustainability Grants to dairy farms by the Community Investment Account. CT Dairy Farms continue to be under financial stress similar to conditions for when the Agricultural Sustainability Grants were originally put into the CIA. Unfortunately, the conditions have not changed and no progress has been made with Federal Milk policy and pricing reform. Currently, federal milk pricing formulas do not account for the cost of producing milk in CT. It should be pointed out that the CIA trigger formula contained within the current CIA does not produce a payment when the cost of production is below what a dairy farm receives for the price of milk. So therefore, the CIA formula triggers a payment only when needed and does not trigger when a payment is not financially justified by the formula. In other words, the dairy safety net only pays out when needed and should not be viewed as an open-ended unregulated payment. The Agricultural Sustainability Grants only pay out when the need arises and I would respectfully request that this dairy safety net be allowed to remain in place as there is a sound fair financial basis underlying it. Please remove the CIA sunset provisions.

In today's world, it's all about jobs and economic impact. By official studies from University of Connecticut, CT Agriculture is a 3.5 Billion dollar industry with 20,000 jobs. CT Dairy is over 1 Billion Dollars of this economic value to CT as well as several thousand jobs. CT Dairy provides the infrastructure for the overall Agricultural economic engine in CT as well as the primary place-holder of the CT Agricultural land base for which there are long-term investments being made through land preservation efforts. In addition, CT Dairy Farms contribute substantial environmental ecosystem services to our state. All of these contributions by CT Dairy farms to the State Of Connecticut can continue by simply removing the sunset provisions of the CIA and allow the Agricultural Sustainability Grants be made by the fair formulas contained with it. There is considerable leverage of the return on investment for the CIA Agricultural Sustainability Grants to CT Dairy Farms. One can view these grants as stimulus payments for a great opportunity to grow agriculture in the future for the State of Connecticut and its economy!

The Community Investment Account funds the Agricultural Viability Grant program, the Farm Transition program, the CT Grown program, the Farmlink program, the CT Farmland Preservation program as well as the Agricultural Sustainability Grants to CT Dairy Farms. I request your support in continuing this funding for all these programs as it is a great package of opportunity to grow Agriculture and thereby the economy for Connecticut.

Respectfully Submitted, Peter M. Orr, Thompson CT, 06277

My name is Richard J. Soltes. My wife and I own 55 acres of woodland in Cornwall which is on the 10 MIL portion of the grand list. I had originally intended to build one house on the property as a family retreat and was not aware that by putting the entire property in forest land under C.G.S. §12-93, I was committing the entire property to forest for 100 years under a penalty which increases each year. I did not receive the information which was publicized during the limited period of time in which property owners could convert from the 10 MIL list to PA490 forest land without penalty. I have been in contact with other 10 mil property owners who have made the same mistake on their properties in Connecticut so I know that I was not alone in my assumptions.

The proposed bill is a step in the right direction. I understand that towns like Cornwall are reluctant to give up any revenue (if in fact this is revenue the town would eventually receive). The proposed bill would allow property owners to put the entire property under a conservation easement and transfer to PA490, without paying the greater penalty under C.G.S. §12-96. Would it be possible to include a provision which would allow the property owner the option of one building site (which in Cornwall is 5 acres) subject to the PA490 penalty, provided that the rest of the property was put into a conservation easement. This would allow one home to be built on the property, with a penalty to be paid, but would include a conservation easement as a trade-off. Otherwise, I do not see too many land owners opting for this approach. (Even the agricultural land program allows one building site in an area determined by the Commissioner).

Senators and Representatives, Please let me know if this approach has any merit.

Sincerely, Richard J. and Mary M. Soltes.