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Written Testimony of Christopher Phelps, Program Director
Before the Connecticut General Assembly Energy & Technology Committee

March 8, 2011

Written testimony supporting SB 6544, An Act Concerning Energy Efficiency

Senator Fonfara, Representative Nardello, Senator Witkos, Representative Hoydick, and members of the Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to offer this testimony supporting SB 6544. Environment Connecticut is a member-supported non-profit environmental advocacy organization.

Environment Connecticut supports policies to increase energy efficiency in Connecticut, reducing energy waste, slashing electric bills, and breaking our dependence on oil and other increasingly expensive, polluting energy sources. SB 6544 can go a long way towards meeting these goals for Connecticut and we urge its passage. To that end, we offer the following comments and suggestions regarding the various provisions of the bill:

Sections 1 & 2: We support these provisions establishing energy rating disclosure for buildings. This policy would directly benefit consumers and businesses by allowing them to have information regarding a home or office prior to entering into purchase or lease agreements. This would in turn create an incentive for efficiency improvements to buildings, reducing energy waste and cutting our dependence on oil and other expensive, polluting energy sources.

Section 4: Environment Connecticut opposes this section as currently drafted. Moving the evaluation of the effectiveness of Efficiency Fund programs from the ECMB to the DPUC would result in a proverbial “fox guarding the henhouse” situation. Unfortunately, the DPUC has demonstrated all too clearly in recent years that it is hostile towards energy efficiency and we are skeptical of the agency’s ability to be an unbiased evaluator of the effectiveness of energy efficiency programs. If the problem the committee is attempting to address is the appearance of conflict of interest in the dual role played by the utilities as paid administrators of Efficiency Fund programs while they are also involved in the decision making processes of the ECMB, then we believe a better approach is to directly address that appearance of a conflict of interest by prohibiting the EDC’s from sitting on the ECMB or being directly involved in any of its decisions.

Section 5: We strongly support allowing municipalities the option of requiring new buildings to meet strict energy efficiency standards.

Section 6: Creating a strong energy performance contracting program for Connecticut governments could be a huge step towards cutting energy costs incurred by state government as well as municipalities. Indeed, while the administration of former Governor Rell issued many press releases and statements regarding their goals for reducing energy usage and costs at state facilities, the recent Commission on Enhancing Agency Outcomes finding that energy bills at state facilities skyrocketed in the last few years demonstrates how urgently this problem needs to be addressed. Creation of an EPC program can help fix this problem and cut state energy expenses. It can also provide the same benefit to cash-strapped cities and towns. Our neighboring states such as New York and Massachusetts have already created such programs, it's time for Connecticut to get off the dime and do so as well. This will save money for taxpayers and reduce our dependence on oil and other fossil fuels.

Sincerely,

Christopher Phelps
Program Director
Environment Connecticut