

Central Connecticut Solid Waste Authority

DATE: March 7, 2014

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TO: Chairmen and Members of the Connecticut General Assembly's Environment Committee

FROM: Jeffrey K. Bridges, Town Manager, Town of Wethersfield and Chair, Central Connecticut Solid Waste Authority; and
Members of the Central Connecticut Solid Waste Authority

RE: Comment on SB 27 "An Act Concerning Connecticut's Recycling and Materials Management Strategy"

The Central Connecticut Solid Waste Authority (CCSWA) is encouraged by elements of SB 27 that would take steps to modernize the solid waste management system in Connecticut. SB 27 represents an opportunity to rectify current weaknesses in the solid waste management system by synthesizing the findings and recommendations of numerous planning initiatives, including the Resource Recovery Task Force and the Governor's Recycling Work Group.

CCSWA was initially established in reaction to deficiencies in the CRRRA-led solid waste management system and has served as an effective way for municipalities to work collectively to address specific disposal needs as well as plan strategically for the future. CCSWA supports the delineation of a role for municipalities in planning for, and implementing, changes in solid waste management, and would seek to make that role even more robust.

This bill would amend certain statutes pertaining to the Connecticut Resource and Recovery Authority. The proposed bill raises three areas of concern to members of the Central Connecticut Solid Waste Authority:

1. The direct impact of the proposal on existing contracts for solid waste disposal services,
2. The role envisioned for municipalities in mapping the future course of solid waste management in Connecticut, and
3. The preservation of municipalities' ability to benefit from evolution of the solid waste market and technological advancements.

Over the course of about a year, the Central Connecticut Solid Waste Authority conducted an extensive vendor selection process and contract negotiation with the CRRRA for disposal services. During that time, representatives of CRRRA assured the CCSWA that the current plant would be viable, reliable and operational for an extended period of time. As a result, members of CCSWA entered into contracts with CRRRA ranging in length from three to fifteen years based on assurances that there would be no radical or onerous changes in operations or costs.

The transition to, and implementation of, the Materials Innovation and Recycling Authority creates uncertainty in terms of how existing contracts will be addressed and introduces new

questions about the cost of solid waste services and how much control cities and towns have over those costs. Chief among those questions is whether existing contracts will simply continue without change under the new structure or be modified. How opt-out provisions are treated is also a significant concern to members. While not a perfect guarantee, the current contracts do provide some form of price cap with the ability to seek alternatives if that cap is exceeded.

In addition to reassuring municipalities about the continuity of services and stability of costs under the proposed legislation, CCSWA members also suggest that the bill address an ongoing concern with the existing solid waste management system. Customers of the CRRRA have long found that obtaining information about decisions affecting services and costs, and influencing those decisions, has required tireless persistence. One of the more effective lines of communication between the CRRRA and its customer municipalities was the Municipal Advisory Committee, or MAC. When CRRRA abolished the MAC, that channel of communication closed and member municipalities again found themselves without an effective voice regarding CRRRA matters. This proposed bill represents an excellent opportunity to correct this situation.

More broadly, the legislation is an opportunity to fully engage municipalities in the long-term planning for solid waste services, much like has been accomplished through the Resource Recovery Task Force and the Governor's Recycling Work Group. Our hope is that plans for achieving the new recycling and reuse target, redevelopment of the Mid-Conn Project, and other initiatives embodied in the bill will be crafted in collaboration with municipalities. For example, while the bill as proposed specifically lists the best interest of municipalities as one of the criteria for choosing the Mid-Conn redevelopment plan, we envision a fully engaged role for municipalities in shaping that plan. The Resource Recovery Task Force, recognizing that the current Mid-Conn Project is the least efficient waste-to-energy plant in the state, views it as a bridge to a transformed waste management system – one that may or may not even include a Mid-Conn plant in the long run.

In light of the inefficiency of the existing system, interest in building an infrastructure that supports increased recycling and reuse, and evolving technologies, CCSWA members seek flexibility and the preservation of solid waste management options going forward. In particular, members hope that the legislation does not lead to a slow-down or stoppage in the permitting of facilities that can provide disposal capacity options for towns and cities.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide this comment on SB 27. CCSWA looks forward to working closely with the Governor's Office and State agencies in planning for the future of solid waste management in Connecticut.