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Written Testimony of Christopher Phelps, Environment Connecticut State Director  
Before the Connecticut General Assembly Environment Committee

March 10, 2015

Regarding:

**HB 5733:** AN ACT REQUIRING THE STATE TREASURER TO DIVEST FUNDS FROM FOSSIL FUEL COMPANIES

**HB 5286:** AN ACT PROHIBITING THE IMPORT AND SALE OF COSMETICS THAT CONTAIN MICROBEADS

**SB 366:** AN ACT EXTENDING THE BAN ON THE USE OF LAWN CARE PESTICIDES TO SCHOOLS THAT HOUSE GRADES NINE TO TWELVE, INCLUSIVE, AND TO STATE FACILITIES

**SB 1063:** AN ACT CONCERNING THE APPLICATION OF PESTICIDES ON SCHOOL GROUNDS AND CERTAIN PUBLIC SPACES, AUTHORIZING THE USE OF CERTAIN MICROBIALS AND REESTABLISHING THE PESTICIDE ADVISORY COUNCIL

Senator Kennedy, Representative Albis, Senator Chapin, Representative Shaban, and members of the committee,

My name is Chris Phelps; I am State Director for Environment Connecticut. We are a nonprofit environmental advocacy organization working to protect Connecticut's air, water, and natural landscape. We appreciate this opportunity to offer testimony regarding these bills.

**HB 5733 (SUPPORT):**

Global warming-fueled climate change is altering the face of our planet. The climate we experience today is very different from that experienced by our grandparents. Temperatures are warmer, storms are more powerful, and coastal flooding is increasing, to name just a few impacts we've seen right here in Connecticut.

Carbon pollution from the burning of coal, oil, and gas is the main cause of global warming and climate change. Without quick action to dramatically cut that pollution, the world in which we and our children live in coming years will become increasingly inhospitable and dangerous.

Our economy has begun to turn away from dependence upon fossil fuels. As prices of oil, coal, and natural gas continue their inexorable rise, the cost of wind and solar power has plummeted in recent years. At the same time, the amount of new solar and wind electric generation capacity built nationwide has begun to eclipse fossil fuels. In Connecticut alone, the amount of solar power generation grew nearly fifty percent annually over the past four years. If that pace continues, within ten years Connecticut will get twenty percent of its power from solar.

Divesting Connecticut's taxpayer-supported investments in fossil fuel companies, as HB 5733 would do, is a common sense step both economically and environmentally. It would send a powerful signal that Connecticut is serious about confronting the very real environmental and economic threat posed by climate change. Environment Connecticut urges the committee to support this bill.

**HB 5286 (SUPPORT):**

Plastic pollution in our environment is a serious and increasing problem worldwide. Last month we testified before this committee supporting legislation that would phase out use of plastic shopping bags – one of the more visible sources of plastic pollution in our waterways and environment. HB 5286 attempts to phase out use of a less readily visible, but nonetheless significant, source of plastic pollution in our waterways.

Tiny plastic “microbeads” contained in cosmetic and personal care products end up washed down the drain and into our waterways. As we noted in our testimony supporting the proposed phase out and ban on use of plastic shopping bags, the average such bag is used for 12 minutes before being discarded but can persist in, and damage, the environment for hundreds of years or more. Much the same is true of the plastic microbeads washing down drains and into waterways across Connecticut every day.

Other jurisdictions across the country and around the world have begun to take action to restrict or ban use of microbeads in response to growing awareness of the threat they pose to our waterways and environment. Connecticut should take action to phase out and ultimately ban use of microbeads. We urge the committee to support HB 5286.

**SB 366 & SB 1063:**

Environment Connecticut strongly supports maintaining the integrity of Connecticut's existing prohibition on application of pesticides at k-8 schools. We also strongly support extension of this prohibition to all k-12 schools in the state.

Pesticides are well documented to pose serious environmental and public health threats. In particular, children exposed to toxic chemicals in pesticides are at increased risk of various

illnesses, including cancer. Connecticut's ban on application of pesticides at schools is a common-sense measure to reduce children's exposure to these toxic chemicals. Extending the ban to schools with grades 9-12 would strengthen this protection.

On a personal note, I have been a member of the Portland Board of Education for the past 12 years, serving 6 years as board chairman. Portland High School is part of a facility housing grades 7 through 12. As such, Connecticut's existing school pesticide ban already applies to our high school athletic fields. While initial implementation of the necessary grounds management changes to comply with the ban was challenging, our district was able to do so successfully. In my opinion, our school district's experience has been that the existing ban has not caused either an undue economic burden, or created any significant unintended health and safety threats.

Thank you for the opportunity to offer this testimony.

Sincerely,

Chris Phelps, State Director  
Environment Connecticut