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Testimony in opposition to HB 5461

Chairman Albis, Chairman Kennedy, and Members of the Environment Committee; my name is Scott Miller, and I am co-owner of Maple Hill Farms in Bloomfield CT. For over 80 years we have been in business here, my brother and I being the third generation of owners.

We distribute milk and ice cream through vending machines, as well as wholesale. We also sell snacks, soda and water, among other common items. Over the last twenty years we have witnessed a loss in sales primarily to the moving of blue collar manufacturing out of state. At one point, we had 45 employee – a number that has been more than halved, to 22. It sometimes seems as though we are in constant battle with the legislature – not once has a legislator asked for our input on proposed legislation and how it would affect our industry. We struggle to pay the large property tax, absorb the 5-cent tax associated with the bottle bill, and all other taxes and fees associated with running a business. To now have another tax on candies and sodas is too much to bear; we can barely operate with the skeleton crew of 22 we have now.

Maple Hill Farms belongs to the CT Vending Association. We are a small group of small business owners that employ hard-working people. The CVA does employ a lobbyist who keeps us informed of legislation affecting our industry. Oftentimes, she requests that we put our business on hold so we can come down to the Capitol to testify on bill after bill that seeks to tax us more.

Once each year, the CVA sets up a display in the hallway of the LOB. We give out samples of our product and letters that outline our many concerns. One prominent legislator responded to me about increasing the deposit of the bottle bill; that it was good for the people who pick them up off the streets. I was floored and saddened and worried.

Now I hear that the Governor is proposing to lower the sales tax, and paying for it by getting rid of exemptions. The vending industry relies on its exemption, which already excludes soda and candy. If these go through Maple Hill Farms will not be able to exist. There is not enough money left after taxes to afford any more.

Maple Hill has over the years had to make numerous cuts in spending. I urge you to stop doing things that don't work. Try something different - we try anything and everything to stay afloat. I would like the State to do the same. State business are not a bottomless pit of money; you cannot keep taking from your people.

Sincerely,

Scott Miller
Vice President
Maple Hill Farms