2074 Park St., #210
Hartford, CT 06106
(860) 231-8842
www.EnvironmentConnecticut.org

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

February 4, 2015

Supporting Senate Bill 349: AN ACT CONCERNING SINGLE-USE CARRYOUT PLASTIC AND PAPER BAGS AND THE USE OF REUSABLE BAGS

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 in support of SB 349.

Since their introduction in the mid-1970s, usage of single-use plastic bags has grown enormously. In 1986, plastic bags had gained approximately 20% market share compared to paper. Ten years later, in 1996, plastic's market share had grown to approximately 65%. By the year 2000, plastic bag generation in the US was estimated to be as high as 900 bags per capita.

This dramatic growth in plastic bag usage has resulted in significant environmental harm.

- Plastic bags are now one of the largest sources of litter. Because they are lightweight and easily become airborne, they frequently escape from trash cans, garbage trucks, landfills, & etc.
- Non-biodegradable plastic bags persist in the environment for decades. Birds, marine mammals, fish, and other wildlife are directly harmed by bags through entanglement and ingestion.
- Plastic, including large amounts from bags, are a major contributor to pollution in the world's oceans. (Including the infamous "garbage patch" in both the Pacific and Atlantic oceans.)

In addition to the direct, ongoing, and increasing harm caused to water & wildlife by plastic bags, they also are responsible for significant generation of carbon pollution and consumption of oil & gas. Annual plastic bag production in the U.S. is estimated to use the equivalent of 1.2 million barrels of oil and generation of millions of tons of pollution fueling global warming.

SB 349 would result in the eventual phase out of the use of single-use plastic bags in many retail locations throughout Connecticut. By passing this bill, Connecticut would join California, which recently enacted a similar measure, as well as large cities and small towns from Hawaii to Massachusetts that have enacted plastic bag bans of their own.

Environment Connecticut strongly supports SB 349 and urges its passage. However, we expect that the committee will hear from many industry opponents who will make claims about the potential "harm" this bill can cause. Respectfully, we would like to offer a few examples of such claims based on our colleagues' experience in California and other jurisdictions, and our responses:

Claim: "This bill will harm consumers by forcing them to pay for bags."

Response: Consumers are already paying higher prices for the use of plastic bags. Retailers currently pass on costs associated with providing "free" bags to consumers. Analysis of the marketplace in California estimated that the average household paid $17 annually in higher grocery prices to cover the cost of "free" bags. Additionally, those consumers who already voluntarily use reusable bags are, in effect, subsidizing the provision of single-use bags by retailers to other consumers.

Claim: "Alternatives to plastic bags are not environmentally friendly."

Response: Tens of billions of plastic bags are used every year. The plastic in those bags is non-biodegradable and made from non-renewable petroleum products. Annual US plastic bag production is estimated to use the equivalent of 1.2 million barrels of oil. California State University Chico conducted an analysis that found reusable bags made from recycled polyethylene use 50% less energy, result in 40% lower emissions of climate pollution, and use 30% less water to produce.

Claim: "Banning plastic bags won't reduce litter."

Response: Nationwide, hundreds of municipal governments, both large and small, have already banned plastic bags and have firsthand experience of the actual effects of those bans. In California, the cities of San Jose and San Francisco have reported reductions in bags in storm drains, waterways, and on city streets.

Environment Connecticut fully supports SB 349. It establishes a reasonable, and feasible, timeline to phase out single-use plastic bags in Connecticut. This is a good idea whose time has come. We urge the General Assembly to approve this legislation and join the other states and local governments that have already acted to ban single-use plastic bags.

Sincerely,

Chris Phelps, State Director
Environment Connecticut