



**Testimony to the CGA Joint Committee on the Environment
Testimony by Citizens Campaign for the Environment
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**February 4, 2015
Hartford, CT**

Senator Kennedy, Representative Albis, distinguished members of the Environment Committee, thank you for the opportunity to speak today.

My name is Louis Burch, government relations liaison for Citizens Campaign for the Environment (CCE). Supported by over 80,000 members in Connecticut and New York State, CCE works to empower communities and advocate solutions that protect public health and the natural environment. CCE would like to offer the following testimony:

SB 349- AAC Single-Use Carryout Plastic and Paper Bags and the Use of Reusable Bags

Single-use, disposable plastic and paper bags are wasteful, harmful to our environment and wildlife, and completely unnecessary. The average plastic bag is only used for about 12 minutes, but the damage it does to the environment can last for 1,000 years. Plastic bags are non-biodegradable, persist in our environment, litter open spaces, clog storm drains, cause flooding, pollute waterways, and threaten wildlife. Both marine and avian species can become trapped and strangled by discarded bags, and can mistake the bags for food, which can cause a slow and painful death through starvation. This problem is especially pronounced in our oceans, where plastic particles outnumber plankton and other microscopic life forms. Researchers estimate there are over 46,000 pieces of plastic swirling about in every square mile of our oceans today.

Single-use carryout bags are also costly and highly energy intensive. Manufacturing paper bags consume approximately 14 million trees every year in the U.S. In the US, most plastic bags are made from natural gas, and require roughly 2.2 billion pounds of fossil fuel and 3.9 billion gallons of fresh water to produce, while producing a billion pounds of solid waste, and 2.7 million tons of CO₂.

Paper and plastic checkout bags are not free; they cost the consumers and taxpayers billions of dollars every year. Due to high shipping and manufacturing costs, U.S. retailers spend approximately \$4 billion annually to purchase disposable bags, and the costs are passed on to the consumer in the price of the goods they purchase. Connecticut towns incur expenses to mitigate flooding caused by bags blocking our storm drains and sewage infrastructure, and to unclog recycling equipment where plastic bags create a costly and time-consuming nuisance for municipal sanitation personnel. While Connecticut works to create less waste and invest in programs to increase sustainability and recycling, plastic bags keep us tied to an outdated, throw-away culture with widespread impacts on our environment.

The solution is simple; adopt policies that promote and incentivize the switch to reusable bags. Hundreds of municipalities around the world have already done so with measurable success. As has been demonstrated by a growing number of communities, nations, and states, establishing a fee on single-use bags helps to conserve natural resources, cut down on litter, and prevent plastic pollution from entering our waterways. LA County passed a ban on single-use plastic and paper bags and imposed a charge on recycled paper bags. A 2010 socioeconomic study predicted little to no economic impact on consumers or retailers resulting from the policy, In Washington DC, where a 5-cent fee on single-use paper and plastic bags was enacted in 2009, the city reduced bag use by as much as 60% in the first year. In Ireland, a 2002 fee on plastic bags has reduced consumption by over 90%. It is clear that reusable incentives coupled with good public education are effective at reducing plastic waste and changing consumer behavior.

In recent years, due to increased public education efforts, the public has become increasingly aware of the environmental damage that single-use bags can cause. However, despite numerous public education campaigns and mandatory bag recycling options at retail stores across the nation, disposable bag pollution persists. Only 5-10% of plastic bags are recycled properly. According to the Office of Legislative Research, Connecticut residents still consume about 400 million plastic bags per year. It is clear that educational and recycling efforts alone are not sufficient in reducing bag pollution in the environment. Legislative bans and fees are the only proven way to truly change consumer behavior and reduce consumption of wasteful plastic and paper bags.

Connecticut has established itself as a national leader in environmental protection, and should take swift and decisive action to reduce pollution single-use shopping bags. Establishing a 10-cent fee on paper and plastic will create a rapid decline in disposable bag use, while generating much needed funding to support retailer and customer education programs. After a period of two years, consumption of single-use checkout bags will have fallen significantly, and the transition to eliminating single use bags outright will be seamless. Beginning October 1, 2017, Connecticut residents will be able to purchase 100% compostable and recyclable shopping bags for 25 cents, which will allow consumers the choice of a disposable bag offered at the checkout counter once traditional checkout bags have been eliminated.

Reusable bags are a cost-effective, common sense solution to disposable bag pollution and should be promoted and incentivized at retail stores throughout Connecticut. By putting a fee on single-use paper and plastic bags, Connecticut will measurably reduce disposable bag consumption, reduce our reliance on fossil fuels and protect our shared water resources and aquatic ecosystems. **CCE strongly supports passage of SB 349 to reduce the distribution of single-use carryout bags and promote reusable bag use in Connecticut.**

HB 6033- AAC the Inclusion of Juices, Teas and Sports Drinks under Connecticut's Bottle Bill
Connecticut's Bottle Bill was passed in 1978 to cut down on litter from discarded beer and soda containers. It is a commonsense way to increase recycling, and remains an effective tool against pollution today. By establishing a 5-cent deposit on approved beverage containers, Connecticut was able to incentivize recycling of beer and soda bottles. That law was expanded in 2009 to include water bottles and as a result, approximately 70% of containers covered under Connecticut's bottle deposit law are recycled properly.

Unfortunately, many kinds of bottles and cans are still not included in the law, including sports drinks, teas, juices and energy drinks. These drinks are growing increasingly popular among consumers and are made of the same kinds of recyclable plastics and aluminum as beer, soda, and water, and yet do not benefit from increased recycling value attached to traditional beverage containers covered under the

law. Despite this, efforts to expand Connecticut's Bottle Bill to include these drinks have been blocked by industry time and time again. The result is more than 300 million soft drink containers being thrown away in Connecticut every year, contributing to litter, increased plastic waste in the environment, and increased costs associated with municipal solid waste management. Many of these bottles end up being incinerated, which contributes heavily to dioxin pollution and diminished air quality in surrounding communities.

The Bigger, Better Bottle Bill is an effective way to reduce impacts on the environment, increase recycling, and reduce the amount of trash entering the solid waste stream. Today, 70% of bottles and cans covered by the bottle bill are recycled, versus about 25% of those that are not covered by the law. CCE also supports using unclaimed funds collected by the state to be directed into existing environmental and/or recycling programs.

Connecticut's Bottle Bill is outdated and must be updated to reflect current trends. By adding bottles and cans from single-serving juices, teas, sports and energy drinks, Connecticut can significantly increase recycling rates on beverage containers across the state, while increasing revenue for municipal recycling programs. **CCE strongly supports the adoption of an updated bottle deposit law for Connecticut which includes juices, teas, sports and energy drinks.**