Session Year 2016

Written Testimony Regarding

Raised Senate Bill No. 387

AN ACT REQUIRING THE ESTABLISHMENT OF A CELL PHONE RECYCLING PROGRAM

Testifiers: Matthew Spadaccini and Amelia Halpryn, Students

We are representatives from a First Lego League Team from Vernon, CT made up of 9 students between the ages of 9 and 14. We focused on recycling cell phones for a project that we did. Senator Tony Gugleilmo and Representative Claire Janowski were kind enough to watch our project presentation to the Vernon Town Council and they were inspired to create this bill.

When people throw their cell phones in the trash, they're contributing to the largest growing waste source. Cell phones have a shorter life span that other electronics like TVs or computers because people get new cellphones often. Over the course of two years the number of cell phones in the trash has gone up by 10 million. Even though it is illegal to throw away your cell phone in the garbage in Connecticut, some people still do because they don't have any incentive to recycle them. Currently, there are places that collect cell phones for recycling, but it is not enough, because people are still throwing out their cell phones in the trash. They are not getting money or any other types of benefits for recycling their cell phones. And it's inconvenient for people to recycle them because they have to go out of their way to bring their cell phones to a recycling place.

When cell phones are thrown away, toxic chemicals are released, including arsenic, antimony, beryllium, cadmium, copper, lead, nickel, mercury and zinc. Ingestion of these chemicals can cause multiple health problems, including digestive problems, potentially fatal lung disease, and kidney disease. When cell phones are crushed during garbage transportation, these chemicals are released into the environment and potentially our water supply. This is the same water that we all drink, and that provides water for the plants and animals that we consume!

Our idea to help solve this problem was to get a law passed that requires people to pay a refundable deposit when they purchase a cell phone. For example, the deposit might be 5% of the phone's sale price. We thought that if cell phones have a refundable deposit on them, people would have a greater incentive to recycle them rather than throw them out.

We also designed a machine to collect cell phones for recycling. The 'cell phone collector' machine would dispense a receipt that could be redeemed for the amount of the deposit, similar to bottle deposit machines. We interviewed an engineer from TOMRA, which is a company that makes bottle/can reverse vending machines. He said that our idea was very similar to a bottle return machine that his company makes, so it would be easy to modify their machine to collect cell phones. Most cell phones already have their own bar code, which would make it even easier to modify their machine.

When a consumer bought a cell phone, they would pay a deposit to the retailer. When the consumer wanted to get rid of the phone, they could return it to the 'cell phone collector' machine at any retailer store and get back the deposit they paid upon purchase. Any unclaimed deposits would go to the distributer, who would use that money to pay for handling fees. As with the bottle/can deposit process, the State of Connecticut would also get a small percentage of the unclaimed deposits. Any retailer that sold cell phones would be required to dispose of them properly.

Once the cell phones were collected in the 'cell phone collector' machine, the recycling company would pick up the cell phones from the machines and check to see if they worked. The cell phones that worked would be re-purposed or re-sold. The cell phones that didn't work would be recycled. One method of recycling cell phones is to take the working parts of broken phones and combine them with the working parts of other used cell phones to make one ready-to-use cell phone. The rebuilt cell phone can then be sent back into circulation without ever needing newly manufactured parts or more resources. Another way to recycle cell phones is to melt down or shred them and separate parts of the phone, extracting the valuable resources such as gold and platinum.

If this law is passed, these types of machines could be set up all over Connecticut so people could get their deposit back when they return their cell phones to these machines, like they do currently for bottles and cans. This could be a model for the rest of the country.

We also talked with a representative of an electronics recycling plant. His company collects cell phones & recycles them. He thought this idea was great because it would result in less cell phones in landfills.

In summary, we feel it is important to get cell phones out of the garbage because of their harmful environmental effects. Requiring a refundable deposit on cell phones will give people an incentive to recycle them and result in fewer cell phones in the garbage. We hope that you will support this necessary bill. Thank you for your time.

Sincerely,
Matthew Spadaccini
Amelia Halpryn
(Together with their teammates: Abby Brouillard, Maddy Brouillard, Kayla Flint, Alex Grondin, Cameron Grondin, Clarissa Halpryn and Ethan Perkins)