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Housatonic Resources Recovery Authority  
**Testimony in support of HB 5618 AAC An Increase in the Handling Fee for Bottle Redemption Centers and in opposition to SB 996 AA Establishing a Bottle Recycling Fee in Lieu of a Refundable Deposit**  
Environment Committee Public Hearing  
March 13, 2017

Co-Chairs Kennedy, Miner and Demicco, Vice Chairs Flexer, Bond-Somers, and Gresko, Ranking Member Harding and other members of the Environment Committee, thank you for the opportunity to comment on this proposed legislation. We are commenting on behalf of the Housatonic Resources Recovery Authority (HRRRA), the solid waste and recycling management agency established by and operated on behalf of eleven municipalities in western Connecticut including the Towns of Bethel, Bridgewater, Brookfield, Kent, New Fairfield, New Milford, Newtown, Redding, Ridgefield and Sherman and the City of Danbury.

Both these bills concern the state's bottle deposit program. Improving that program is essential to meeting the goals of the Comprehensive Materials Management Strategy (CMMS) to divert and/or recycle at least 60% of the solid waste generated in the State. HB 5618 would strengthen the existing deposit program by increasing the handling fee a penny for dealers or operators of redemption centers. This fee has not been increased since 1986, while the CPI has increased 118% during that same time, and the legislature has increased the minimum wage from \$3.37/hr. to \$10.10/hr., or almost 200%, during that same time period. This increase is badly needed for these dealers and operators to be able to stay in business – saving jobs in the state. HRRRA supports HB 5618 as a long overdue enhancement to the current bottle deposit law.

SB 996, on the other hand, does away with the existing bottle deposit program and replaces the current deposit with a non-refundable recycling fee, with the proceeds going to the state. HRRRA opposes SB 996 for several reasons. Research consistently shows that more bottles are collected in states with bottle deposit systems than in states without because there is a financial incentive for redemption. That holds down the cost of bottle beverages for consumers who return the bottles they purchase. It keeps the streets and roadsides of our communities and our countryside cleaner by reducing litter. It results in a cleaner stream of material which improves the value of the recycled containers over collection conducted as a part of mixed stream recycling. Bottle bill deposits provide much needed assistance to some of our regions poor and homeless, who collect discarded bottles and redeem them for cash. And bottle deposits have also proven to be amazingly good at helping to fund non-profits and charitable activities.

In our region, Habitat for Humanity was able to build more houses due to beverage container deposits collected at local transfer stations by the Boy Scouts. A number of churches in our region schedule bottle and can drives several times a year and use the funds from the deposits to support youth programs or missions. One of our member towns, the Town of Kent, has raised more than \$120,000 redeeming beverage containers collected at its local transfer station and used to support scholarship for its high school students.

Rather than do away with the beverage container deposit and recycling system as it currently exists, the program should be expanded to include all types of beverage containers, to increase the deposit from \$.05 to \$.10, and to provide additional funding to the dealers and operators of redemption centers so that the law works optimally. We encourage members to review the detailed research and charts prepared by Susan Collins of the Container Recycling Institute, which shows how each of these improvements in the current law would affect recycling as well as revenue to the State.

SB 996 appears to be a bill intended to entice the State of Connecticut, during a time of fiscal crisis, to abandon its commitment to beverage container recycling in order to get more funds for itself. It is a clever ruse from the special interests who routinely have tried to kill the beverage container recycling system since it was first passed. We hope it is a ruse the Environment Committee will not fall for.

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