Testimony to the CGA Environment Committee
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Senator Kennedy, Senator Miner, Representative Demicco, distinguished vice chairs, ranking members and esteemed members of the CGA Environment Committee, thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony on this important issue.

My name is Louis Burch, Connecticut Program Director 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 for solutions that protect public health and the natural environment. CCE appreciates the opportunity to offer the following testimony on HB 6313:

HB 6313- AN ACT ESTABLISHING A TAX ON SINGLE-USE PLASTIC AND PAPER BAGS

Connecticut residents use between 800 million and 1 billion single-use bags every year. Single-use, disposable plastic and paper bags are unnecessary and pose a threat to our environment. CCE strongly supports this committee’s efforts to reduce single-use bag pollution by placing a 5-cent fee on paper and plastic bags at the checkout counter. As successfully demonstrated in countries and municipalities from Ireland to Washington DC, placing a fee on single-use bags saves natural resources, reduces litter, prevents plastic pollution in our waterways, and incentivizes the environmentally friendly and cost effective alternative, reusable bags.

The average plastic bag is used for 12 minutes, but the damage it causes lasts for decades. Plastic bags persist in our environment, littering open spaces, clogging storm drains and causing localized flooding, polluting waterways, and killing wildlife. Marine and avian life become ensnared in and strangled by discarded bags, and die from consuming the plastic, which mimics aquatic food and attracts toxins as bags begin to break down. There is now more plastic than plankton in the oceans, with 46,000 pieces of plastic in every square mile of our oceans.
Single-use plastic and paper bags also waste money and natural resources. Manufacturing paper bags uses approximately 14 million trees every year. In the US, most plastic bags are manufactured from natural gas, and to produce the 100 billion plastic bags that are thrown away in U.S. every year requires 2.2 billion pounds of fossil fuel and 3.9 billion gallons of fresh water, while producing a billion pounds of solid waste and 2.7 million tons of CO₂. Due to high shipping and manufacturing costs, U.S. retailers spend approximately $4 billion annually to purchase disposable bags, which is being passed on to the consumer in the form of higher prices.

Plastic bags are not free; they cost the state millions of dollars every year to dispose of in the solid waste stream. Additionally, these bags put an undue burden on municipalities, which are responsible for cleaning up plastic bags from roadways and storm drains, where they cause flooding. Plastic bags can easily clog recycling and solid waste infrastructure, which can cause costly delays.

Over the last 20 years, the public has become more aware of the environmental damage that single-use bags cause, and have begun to reduce their consumption of these products and bring reusable alternatives. However, public education in this case is not enough, and an incentive is needed to create a significant change in public behavior.

To save money and protect the environment, cities and countries around the world have enacted fees on single-use plastic and paper bags to encourage consumers to switch to reusable bags. In England, a 5 pence charge has led to an 85% decrease in single-use bags. In Washington, D.C., a 5-cent charge on single use bags led to an 80% decrease of single use bags in the first year, and an overall decrease in single-use bags of 60% since the law was implemented. Since 2010, over $10 million collected from D.C.’s bag fee has gone to Anacostia River clean up programs. Recently, Chicago also passed local laws placing a charge on single-use bags.

By following these successful examples, Connecticut can reduce single-use bag consumption by an estimated 60-90%. A 5-cent tax on plastic and paper bags will help change the public’s behavior, reduce litter, conserve resources, and prevent plastic pollution in local waterways, while saving taxpayers and retailers money. Ensuring the money collected from this bag tax is used for environmental programs will allow the state the further protect our treasured land and water resources.

In conclusion, CCE supports establishing a 5 cent fee on paper and plastic shopping bags in Connecticut. The bag fee is a time tested, proven effective way to change public behavior and incentivize the use of reusable shopping bags, which cut down on pollution and help save communities money. CCE respectfully urges this committee to vote “YES” on HB 6316, and move this common sense legislation as soon as possible.

Thank you for the opportunity to speak today, we look forward to working with you on this important issue moving forward.