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**Environment Committee Public Hearing
Monday , March 11, 2019**

Dear Honored Chairs, Senator Cohen and Representative Demicco and Distinguished members of the Environment Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to address the following bills. My name is Kim O'Rourke, and I am the recycling coordinator for the City of Middletown. I am testifying today because, as you know, recycling is at somewhat of a crossroads. While it has been in the news lately, recycling has always been an important of solid waste management. However, dealing with our trash is becoming more and more complex, and many municipalities, including Middletown have seen significant increases in recycling costs. After educating people about recycling and coordinating programs for over 20 years, I believe it is vital we think outside the box and do something different to stop the current crisis we are facing. Some of the bills under consideration today will help.

***Raised Bill No. 7295 AAC A Recycling Program For Paper and Packaging and Requiring Certain Municipal Solid Waste Management Goals -
SUPPORT.***

This bill will create a producer financed recycling program for packaging (anything you put in your recycling cart, including paper, bottles, cans, plastic containers) and will remove the cost burden from municipal budgets. Connecticut has this type of program for mattresses, electronics, and paint. These programs have proven to be very successful by providing a stable financing system to recycle and properly manage these products. The consumer pays instead of the taxpayer. Manufacturers fund and run the program. Retailers and municipalities play a role.

Why are municipalities responsible for all this waste, when others are making a profit off of it? Companies are changing their packaging constantly- to help the product stay fresh longer, to make the item more attractive, to reduce transportation costs – but no one considers how it gets disposed. Municipalities are left with the task of educating

residents how to properly dispose of this material, often paying for the cost. Manufacturers continue to produce all kinds of amazing packaging, but then have no concern how it is disposed of or the incredible amount of waste it is producing. Oranges are peeled and packaged in plastic containers. Apples are sliced and put in bags. Bananas are separated and put on trays and wrapped in plastics. Boxes are replaced by fancy, plastic envelopes. Shouldn't the companies that develop this material play a significant role in disposing of it? Currently, municipalities are responsible for recycling and reducing all this new waste, even as packaging becomes more and more complex to handle, and as markets for recyclables are lost. The system has to change.

This bill will provide the systemic change that is needed to fix this problem. It will create an extended producer responsibility (EPR) program, similar to what we already have for paint, mattresses and electronics. It puts the product manufacturers in charge of recycling packaging materials, encourages them to consider disposal costs, and provides an incentive to reduce waste. It will offer relief to municipalities, provide stability to the programs and develop a more efficient system. It also encourages the manufacturers to consider disposal costs of their products and packaging. Considering the demise of recycling markets, an EPR program will keep recycling viable without impacting municipal budgets.

Please remember: Recycling was never supposed to be an income stream for municipalities. It is a preferred waste management strategy. It has been economical and viable for years, but what happens when it isn't? Municipalities are not designed to withstand drastic declines in markets. We must rethink this system and implement a more sustainable program. For many reasons, first waste reduction, and then recycling are better than incineration and landfilling but, with the rapid changes and the increases in packaging, it is impossible for municipalities to manage it effectively anymore. Please help us by passing this legislation.

*Committee Bill 5384 - AA Requiring the Elimination of Single Use Styrofoam Containers - **SUPPORT***

*Committee Bill 5385 - AA Requiring the Elimination of Single Use Plastic Straws - **SUPPORT***

Both of these bills are important initiatives to help municipalities reduce waste. Municipalities are expected to report to the DEEP about how waste will be reduced by 10% by July 1, 2019. This legislation would be helpful in meeting those requirements. It is important to note that simple alternatives exist for both single use Styrofoam containers and plastic straws. Single use Styrofoam containers are harmful to the environment for so many reasons and can easily be replaced with paper, cardboard and compostable products. Or customers can bring their own reusable containers for takeout. Regarding straws, it is expensive and wasteful to just hand them out automatically. Requiring customers to ask for a straw is very reasonable. It gets people to think about their waste and every bit of reduction helps.

*Raised Bill 7294 AAC Bottle Redemption in the State – **SUPPORT.***

These improvements would help make the bottle return system more efficient and easier to use in Connecticut. Bottle bill material is always a better quality product than single stream. An increase to \$0.10 would help reduce roadside litter and reduce the amount of recyclables the municipality has to handle.

*Committee Bill 5019 AA Establishing a Five Cent Tax on Single Use Plastic and Paper Bags – **Suggest Substitute Language.***

The City of Middletown is currently considering a reusable bag ordinance to protect wildlife, reduce waste and improve the quality of recycling. The language of the draft City ordinance was carefully crafted to reflect waste reduction goals outlined by the State DEEP and to meet Sustainable CT goals, not to mention it is the best way to help our environment and reduce waste. The local ordinance would ban plastic bags and place a fee on paper bags. The fee would go back to the retailers to help cover the higher cost of the paper bags. I am encouraged the State is considering this issue, but I believe a more effective approach is to ban plastic bags, which are a big problem in recycling systems, harmful to wildlife and incredibly wasteful and charge a fee for an alternative paper bag. This proposal, of just taxing single use plastic and paper bags for funding, seems to go against the State's own Comprehensive Materials Management Strategy, which emphasizes waste reduction, sends the wrong message to the public, and develops an unstable stream of funding. Studies have shown that just charging a fee on bags does not change people's behavior and does not reduce the bag usage. If the State insists on passing a tax on these bags, municipalities should be allowed to ban them if they choose.

*Raised Bill 7296 - AAC The Recycling of Glass - **SUPPORT***

This bill will direct the DEEP to develop a plan for best practices for glass recycling. . With the implementation of single stream recycling, glass mixed in this stream is extremely difficult to recycle. Most of it ends up as landfill cover. Some of it is sent to a facility where it can be optically sorted, which is very expensive. Of note, is the fact that Bottle Bill glass is recycled easily, because it is a higher quality material. This bill will also require the use of recycled glass in glass bottles sold in CT to help build the markets which is key to recycling success.

*Raised Bill 1001 - AAC The Recycling and Disposal of Smoke Detectors - **SUPPORT***

This bill will address a problem with recycling and disposal of smoke detectors by considering development of an extended producer responsibility (EPR) program for smoke detectors. Smoke detectors are very difficult to get rid of. They should not go in the regular trash, and are not accepted at the household hazardous waste collection.

Residents call frequently, looking for answers concerning how to dispose of smoke detectors. Currently there are no good answers. An EPR program for smoke detectors would create a viable option for residents and not place an undue burden on municipalities.

Thank you for the opportunity to speak to these important issues. If you have questions, please contact me at kim.orourke@middletownct.gov or 860-638-4855.

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