



Testimony of Environment Connecticut State Director Chris Phelps
Before the Connecticut General Assembly Environment Committee

March 10, 2019

Regarding:

H.B. No. 7294 AN ACT CONCERNING BOTTLE REDEMPTION IN THE STATE. **(Support)**

H.B. No. 7298 AN ACT CONCERNING THE PERMITTING FOR CERTAIN SOLID WASTE FACILITIES AND THE DESIGNATION OF RECYCLABLE ITEMS. **(Oppose)**

S.B. No. 1003 AN ACT CONCERNING THE USE OF SINGLE-USE PLASTIC AND PAPER BAGS. **(Support)**

H.B. No. 5019 AN ACT ESTABLISHING A FIVE-CENT TAX ON SINGLE-USE PLASTIC AND PAPER BAGS. **(Oppose)**

H.B. No. 5384 AN ACT REQUIRING THE ELIMINATION OF SINGLEUSE STYROFOAM CONTAINERS. **(Support)**

H.B. No. 5385 AN ACT REQUIRING THE ELIMINATION OF SINGLEUSE PLASTIC STRAWS. **(Support)**

Senator Cohen, Representative Demicco, and members of the Environment Committee, my name is Chris Phelps and I am State Director for Environment Connecticut. I thank you for the opportunity to submit these comments regarding the bills listed above.

Environment Connecticut is a nonprofit citizen-based environmental advocacy project of Environment America. We work to fight climate change and for a cleaner, greener future for Connecticut and our nation. We represent over 20,000 supporters and activists across our state.

“Reduce, Reuse, and Recycle.” We all know this slogan. For decades it has been central to much rhetoric, advocacy, and policymaking about the problem of waste and its impacts on our society. For at least the past 20 to 30 years, researchers, advocates, and policymakers have focused their attention on the last of those three words. However, today we are increasingly

realizing and coming to grips with the fact that simply recycling as much as possible of the enormous volume of trash our society produces is a woefully insufficient response to the problems that trash causes for wildlife, human health, and the quality of our lives.

The root cause of the harm solid waste causes in our society is simply this: We produce and consume too much stuff. Therefore, policymaking should focus on strategies to reduce the volume of waste we produce and preventing harm in the first place. This sentiment underpins our position, and testimony on the bills before you today.

1. H.B. No. 7294 AN ACT CONCERNING BOTTLE REDEMPTION IN THE STATE.

H.B. 7294 would expand and begin to modernize Connecticut's existing Bottle Bill law. We support much of what is proposed within this legislation. For example:

- Raising the deposit on single-use beverage containers to 10 cents is a long overdue step that would increase the incentive for redemption of such containers.
- Expanding coverage of the deposit system to include additional products in single-use containers (juices, teas, sports drinks & etc.) to reflect changes in the beverage marketplace is a sensible addition to the Bottle Bill.
- Raising handling fees for single-use beverage containers is a long-overdue step and is crucial to ensuring that the redemption system can function efficiently. However, we oppose retaining the existing lower handling fee for beer vs non-alcoholic containers. We urge the committee to amend H.B. 7294 to establish a uniform handling fee for all containers covered under the deposit system.

While we generally support the changes to the Bottle Bill proposed in H.B. 7294, we oppose one particular change contained in this bill:

- At line 263, the bill would allow a portion of unclaimed deposits to be retained by beverage distributors. We strongly oppose this change. Single-use, non-reusable beverage containers are an inherently wasteful, polluting and unnecessary product. As such, public policy should place as much of the economic burden of managing the harm it causes on the producers of that product. Alternately, we urge the committee to amend H.B. 7294 to dedicate a portion of the unclaimed deposits to fund programs to reduce overall generation of solid waste in this state. (Focusing on "reduce" solid waste policy first.)

2. H.B. No. 7298 AN ACT CONCERNING THE PERMITTING FOR CERTAIN SOLID WASTE FACILITIES AND THE DESIGNATION OF RECYCLABLE ITEMS.

Sec. 1 of H.B. 7298 would establish a 90-day automatic permit approval for numerous permits. We strongly oppose this provision. It rolls back a compromise reached in 2018 following ill-

considered legislative action in 2017, and expands upon the types of permit applications covered by the arbitrary and anti-environment automatic approval language in the bill.

3. S.B. No. 1003 AN ACT CONCERNING THE USE OF SINGLE-USE PLASTIC AND PAPER BAGS.

S.B. 1003 would ban single-use plastic bags in Connecticut and establish environmental standards for the composition of paper shopping bags. It also allows for municipalities to enact ordinances that build upon the foundation of S.B. 1003. We strongly support this bill and urge its passage.

When it comes to single-use disposable plastic products, such as plastic shopping bags, policymakers such as yourselves should consider the absurdity of products such as these that are used for a few minutes, yet persist in our environment for centuries to come. This bill, along with others on your agenda today, directly confronts this problem, and does so by encouraging our society to move away from overproduction and consumption of products that are both unnecessary and also harm wildlife, public health, and the quality of our lives.

Lastly, we would like to highlight one particular provision of S.B. 1003 that we strongly support. In line 31 the bill limits the definition of a plastic “reusable carryout bag” to “durable plastic that is at least 12 mils thick.” This is an important limitation that would prevent producers and retailers from skirting the intent of this legislation by using slightly thicker plastic film bags and simply calling them “reusable.”

4. H.B. No. 5019 AN ACT ESTABLISHING A FIVE-CENT TAX ON SINGLE-USE PLASTIC AND PAPER BAGS.

Environment Connecticut opposes H.B. 5019. As noted, we support a ban on single-use plastic bags, as proposed in S.B. 1003. The point of legislation on this topic should be to reduce our use of unnecessary, environmentally harmful products such as single-use plastics. Simply imposing a tax on such products fails to achieve that goal. Worse, establishing such a tax could hinder efforts to ban such bags altogether because once they are taxed, banning single-use plastic bags would result in a revenue loss to the state.

5. H.B. No. 5384 AN ACT REQUIRING THE ELIMINATION OF SINGLE-USE STYROFOAM CONTAINERS.

Every day, we throw away tons of single use cups, containers, and other plastics. Among the most harmful of such single-use disposable plastics are those made of polystyrene foam. (Which most people know as Styrofoam.) H.B. 5384 would ban use of single-use polystyrene containers by food establishments in Connecticut. Environment Connecticut strongly supports this legislation.

Plastic pollution in our environment is causing rapidly increasing harm to wildlife. 86% of all sea turtle species, 44% of seabird species, and 43% of all marine mammals have been found contaminated with plastic fragments. Ingestion of plastics can cause animals to starve and enter the food chain.

In response to rising awareness of the problem, over 200 communities across the nation have taken action to ban foam containers. Large businesses are similarly taking action, including McDonalds which has committed to phasing out foam cups and containers from their stores worldwide.

Connecticut should show leadership on this issue and join the movement to ban polystyrene foam containers by passing H.B. 5384.

6. H.B. No. 5385 AN ACT REQUIRING THE ELIMINATION OF SINGLEUSE PLASTIC STRAWS.

Single-use plastic straws are yet another example of products that contribute to the accumulation of unnecessary, and increasingly destructive plastic pollution in our environment. While H.B. 5385 is relatively limited in its scope, it is a sound first step towards eliminating these harmful products in Connecticut. We support this bill and urge its passage.

Thank you again for the opportunity to comment on these bills today. Environment Connecticut looks forward to working with the committee on these important issues.

Sincerely,

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