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CGA Environment Committee
Public Hearing
March 11, 2019

Written Testimony by Ellen Weininger, Director of Educational Outreach

Support HB 1003 - An Act Concerning Single-Use Plastic and Paper Bags
Support HB 5384 – An Act Eliminating Polystyrene Food Service Containers
Support HB 5385 – An Act Eliminating Single-Use Plastic Straws
Support HB 7294 – An Act Concerning Bottle Redemption in Connecticut

To the Honorable Chairs, Ranking Members and other distinguished members of the Environment Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to comment today.

Grassroots Environmental Education is a science-based, environmental health nonprofit that provides public education regarding health risks of environmental exposures and evidence-based solution tools. Grassroots serves local and state governments, health care providers, school systems, environmental and health organizations nationwide.

Grassroots Environmental Education strongly supports passage of HB 1003, HB 5384, HB 5385, HB 7294.

Grassroots highly commends these important efforts and strongly supports this legislation. Encouraging the use of reusable bags and banning the use of single-use plastic bags for retail checkout as well as eliminating the use of polystyrene food service containers and single-use plastic straws and expanding bottle redemption will protect our climate, our air, water, soil and health and reduce our dependence on fossil fuels and the enormous economic toll exacted from the negative impacts.

Excluding polystyrene, a known carcinogen, used for coffee and take out food containers will help keep polystyrene out of air and water near factories where it is produced, eliminates the health risk to consumers who may use this product, reduces our use of petroleum from which its made, and keeps this non-degradable plastic substance from our water ways for the next thousand years. Many studies have associated exposure to

styrene with reproductive problems and cancer. Styrene can readily leach from containers into food or drinks, especially hot liquids and alcohol.

Discarded polystyrene foam cups and food containers never break down and stay in the environment forever. Some become part of the waste stream headed for incinerators, where burning emits toxic chemicals. A polystyrene container may eventually disintegrate into tiny pieces, but it will never become actual food for bacteria or fungi, environmental decomposers. Styrene, like other plastics in our oceans, is mistaken for food and acts like a magnet for highly toxic persistent chemicals, which can harm or kill aquatic wildlife.

San Rafael, California passed a ban on polystyrene foam in 2012, and has encouraged the use of compostable dishware. Montgomery County, Maryland has been proactive in banning polystyrene, both as a container and loose-fill packaging.

Likewise banning single-use plastic straws will also have a beneficial impact in our efforts to protect our natural resources, our health and climate.

With regard to the plastic bag ban, we strongly urge amending HB 1003 to encourage reusable bag use by including a charge on paper bags.

The U.S. consumes over 100 billion single-use bags every year. That's about one bag per person every day. Just one reusable bag can replace more than 500 single-use bags. Worldwide between 500 billion and 1 trillion plastic bags are consumed annually. In fact, plastic bags are also made from fossil fuel feedstock, non-renewable resources such as oil, natural gas and other chemicals and can take as much as a thousand years to break down in the environment.

We can plainly see the impact in our communities. Plastic bags litter our streets, clog our storm drains and landfills and end up in our oceans, lakes, rivers and bays where they damage critical ecosystems. When rain carries littered plastic bags into drains blocking them, they damage infrastructure and cause localized flooding. Plastic bag pollution can have an effect on existing storm water runoff problems and flooding in our coastal communities.

More than 2 billion pounds of fossil fuels and 3.9 billion gallons of fresh water are used to produce the 100 billion plastic bags consumed nationwide annually. The manufacture of plastic bags produces a billion pounds of solid waste and 2.7 million tons of carbon dioxide per year.

Plastic bags account for over 10% of the debris that washes up on our U.S. coastlines. As most plastic bags do not biodegrade, they eventually break down into smaller and smaller toxic petrochemical particles contaminating our waterways and soil. Worldwide plastic particles outnumber plankton in our oceans with 46,000 pieces of plastic in every square mile of ocean. These plastic polymers consumed by fish become part of our food chain.

Plastic is believed to constitute 90% of the millions of tons of garbage that have formed plastic masses in our oceans, better known as gyres. The North Pacific Garbage Patch, the largest, has over 100 million tons of floating garbage. The Pacific gyre is now more than 500 miles wide. It just takes a few weeks for ocean currents to pull plastic from a bay or beach and into the gyres, where it will remain for hundreds of years.

The effect on wildlife is devastating. Birds become entangled in the bags and sea life can die from ingesting the bags, which they frequently mistake for food. Plastic pollution harms 267 species of marine life with significant fish and wildlife mortality attributed to restricted mobility, strangulation and blocked ingestion.

We strongly urge swift passage of these four critically important legislative measures with the amendment to HB 1003 as already noted.

Thank you again for the opportunity to comment.

Respectfully submitted by,

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