

Environment Committee JOINT FAVORABLE REPORT

Bill No.: HB-5385

Title: AN ACT REQUIRING THE ELIMINATION OF SINGLE-USE PLASTIC STRAWS.

Vote Date: 3/18/2019

Vote Action: Joint Favorable Substitute

PH Date: 3/11/2019

File No.: 552

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SPONSORS OF BILL:

Rep. Dorinda Borer, 115th Dist.
Rep. Patricia A. Dillon, 92nd Dist.
Rep. Christin McCarthy Vahey, 133rd Dist.
Rep. Geraldo, C. Reyes, 75th Dist.
Rep. Michael Winkler, 56th Dist.

Rep. Lucy Dathan, 142nd Dist.
Rep. Michael DiMassa, 116th Dist.
Rep. David Michel, 146th Dist.
Rep. Kerry Sezeps Wood, 29th Dist.

REASONS FOR BILL:

Approximately 500 million plastic straws are used every day in the United States, many of which end up polluting the environment and harm wildlife. Nationally, many cities have banned plastic straws. New York and Hawaii have pending straw ban legislation. In 2018, California signed into law a prohibition on certain restaurants from automatically providing plastic straws to their patrons.

Substitute Language – LCO No. 6229

Many testimonies in opposition expressed concern that the bill will negatively impact persons with disabilities who use plastic straws as a tool for independent living. Such testimonies explain that alternatives are ineffective or dangerous to use. Additionally, these testimonies highlight a similar bill in Washington State that provides an exception for people with disabilities. The original draft of the bill prohibited any owner or operator of a full-service restaurant from providing a single-use plastic straw unless requested by a customer; substitute language explicitly requires the owner or operator to provide such straw to a person with disability, or any other customer, upon request. Additionally, substitute language clarifies that any municipal ordinance adopting a rule that would further restrict the use of single-use plastic straws cannot prohibit an owner or operator of a restaurant from providing such plastic straws to a person with a disability.

RESPONSE FROM ADMINISTRATION/AGENCY:

Katie S. Dykes, Commissioner, Connecticut Department of Energy and Environmental Protection (DEEP): Provided comment on the bill. Plastic straws enter the environment, waterways, and the ocean as litter and have been known to fatally harm marine life. Additionally, plastic straws cannot be recycled through curbside recycling.

NATURE AND SOURCES OF SUPPORT:

Representative Dorinda Borer, 115th Dist.: During a 2017 Ocean Conservancy coastal cleanup, straws were the seventh most trash collected. California passed similar legislation this year and New York is considering a similar bill as well.

Lori Brown, Executive Director, Connecticut League of Conservation Voters: While damaging the environment for thousands of years, plastic straws are typically used in a matter of minutes. Unlike other plastics, straws are rejected from recycling plants due to their tendency to get stuck in the machinery, and are often too small for recycling. Additionally, there are other alternatives to plastic straws. New York, California, and New Jersey, along with many other cities have implemented some form of single-use plastic straw ban. Internationally, England, the European Union, Taiwan, and Vancouver have banned single-use plastic straws.

Louis W. Burch, Connecticut Program Director, Citizens Campaign for the Environment: Tiny plastic fragments from straws and other single-use plastics make up 85% of all the plastic pollution found on shorelines across the world, affecting more than 250 marine and avian species. According to the Ocean Conservancy, plastic straws and stirrers are the seventh most common type of plastic ocean pollution collected at beach cleanup activities worldwide.

Melissa E. Gates, Northeast Regional Manager, Surfer Foundation: The 2017 International Coastal Cleanup report found that straws were one of the top ten items collected globally on U.S. coastlines. Plastic straws contribute greatly to the epidemic of plastic pollution in the ocean. Marine life can be harmed by ingesting plastic straws and broken down plastic. Furthermore, as toxins from marine plastic pollution makes their way up the food chain, it poses a dangerous threat to humans and wildlife who consume them.

Jennifer A. Heaton-Jones, Executive Director, Housatonic Resources Recovery Authority: Plastic straws are detrimental to the overall mixed recycling stream and are considered a contaminate at the Material Recovery Facilities. While many people include plastic straws in recycling, these items never get recycled. This contamination devalues of recyclables, ultimately increasing costs for municipalities.

The Environment Committee received approximately 50 written testimonies in support of the bill explaining (1) the detrimental effects plastic straws have on the environment and marine wildlife and (2) there are increased costs to municipalities when single-use plastic straws enter the curbside recycling stream.

NATURE AND SOURCES OF OPPOSITION:

Connecticut Restaurant Association: There are many restaurants across the state that has already eliminated plastic straws; the Connecticut Restaurant Association supports the ability for business owners to make their own choices on what is best for their business.

Kathy Flaherty, Executive Director, Connecticut Legal Rights Project (CLRP): Access to single-use plastic straws is a disability rights issue. Although seeming to be based from a bill under consideration by the legislature in Washington State, the bill is absent the following language: "In recognition that a straw is an adaptive utensil that may provide basic accommodation for persons with disabilities to eat and drink, a food service establishment must provide a single-use plastic straw upon request to persons with disabilities." Should the committee decide to include such language, subsection (d) of the bill would enable municipalities to adopt complete straw bans. CLRP includes links to various articles written by disabled people who need straws.

Mary-Ann Langton: Shared personal testimony as a person with disabilities who views plastic straws as an essential tool for independent living. Alternatives, such as metal straws are dangerous because of involuntary movements. Additionally, involuntary movements includes involuntarily biting down own papers straws, making them useless. Many people with disabilities are advised not to use alternatives. Additionally, the Environment Committee should review a similar bill proposed by the state of Washington that requires food establishments to provide plastic straws to people with disabilities upon request.

Susan Maffe, President, School Nutrition Association of Connecticut: Straws made from non-plastic materials are not readily available in the marketplace to meet school demands. Many schools who have switched from plastic to paper straws have returned to using plastic straws. Additionally, 100% of juice boxes and juice pouches are not currently available with a paper straw; this causes a concern because only these juice boxes can be distributed pursuant to Connecticut Public Health Code 19-13-B42 according to guidance from the State of Connecticut Department of Education. Finally, paper straws cost more than triple the cost of plastic straws.

The Environment Committee received approximately 5 written testimonies opposing the bill explaining (1) restaurants should have the option of determining what is best for their business, and (2) the bill discriminates against people with disabilities because these people use plastic straws as a tool for independent living.

Reported by: Pamela Bianca / Ussawin R. Bumpen 4/15/2019