

# Environment Committee

## JOINT FAVORABLE REPORT

**Bill No.:** SB-229

AN ACT PROHIBITING THE USE OF STYROFOAM TRAYS IN CONNECTICUT

**Title:** SCHOOLS.

**Vote Date:** 3/18/2019

**Vote Action:** Joint Favorable

**PH Date:** 3/11/2019

**File No.:** 563

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### **SPONSORS OF BILL:**

Sen. James J. Maroney, 14th Dist.

Rep. Dorinda Borer, 115th Dist.

Rep. Anne Meiman Hughes, 135th Dist.

Rep. David Michel, 146th Dist.

Rep. Kim Rose, 118th Dist.

### **REASONS FOR BILL:**

Many have expressed concerns regarding the negative impact polystyrene, commonly known as Styrofoam, products have on the environment. Polystyrene products are not easily recyclable and are not biodegradable. Additionally, many have argued that these products also have negative public health implications. When heated, the chemical components that make up polystyrene, styrene and benzene, are broken down and released. According to the Department of Health and Human Services, these chemicals are potential carcinogens. However, due to its low cost, school districts often choose to use polystyrene trays to serve food to school children. This bill seeks to protect school children, while limiting the introduction of polystyrene products to the environment, by prohibiting the use of polystyrene trays in Connecticut schools.

### **RESPONSE FROM ADMINISTRATION/AGENCY:**

None Expressed.

## **NATURE AND SOURCES OF SUPPORT:**

### **Lori Brown, Executive Director, Connecticut League of Conservation Voters (CTLCV):**

CTLCV supports the bill for the following reasons: (1) polystyrene products fill up the states landfills, account for 30% of landfill space in the United States, and are easily replaced by biodegradable alternatives, (2) polystyrene is often contaminated with food waste and cannot be reused or recycled – there is not a single recycling center that accepts polystyrene trays and containers in Connecticut, (3) polystyrene is hazardous to wildlife, (4) the chemicals, styrene and benzene are potential carcinogens, as identified by the Department of Health and Human Services, which can leak from polystyrene products when exposed to heat, (5) there are numerous biodegradable alternatives to polystyrene, and (6) cities, such as Seattle WA, that have banned polystyrene containers have not suffered negative economic impacts.

**Priscilla Feral, President, Friends of Animals:** Many states and municipalities, such as Rahway NJ, New York City, Los Angeles, Chicago, Miami, Orlando, and Dallas, have banned single-use foams and plastics with proven results.

**Kruttika Gopal, Student, Jonathan Law High School:** Shared personal testimony as the co-founder of the Environmental Club at Jonathan Law High School. Polystyrene is not recyclable and not biodegradable. If polystyrene trays are incinerated, like it is at Jonathan Law High School, the toxic chemical components of such product are released into the air. The Environmental Club has been in contact with with companies such as the Huhtamaki food packaging and labeling company, which manufactures compostable paper trays for the Urban Food Alliance. If purchased in bulk, the school could get a comparable price for the same compostable trays.

**Ming-May Hu, Student Jonathan Law High School:** Shared personal testimony as the co-founder of the Environmental Club at Jonathan Law High School. All of the trash at Jonathan Law High School I incinerated, as a result toxic pollutants from polystyrene trays are released into the atmosphere. Additionally, styrene monomers, known to cause nerve damage, hormonal disruption and possibly cancer, are released from heat. These chemicals are ingested every time a student eats a hot meal off the tray. Many cities have already banned polystyrene lunch trays. The local school districts want to use such products to save money; however, there are many economically friendly alternatives. Compostable trays used in Philadelphia cost one cent more than traditional polystyrene trays.

**Representative Kim Rose, 118<sup>th</sup> Assembly Dist.:** Styrofoam trays offered for school lunches are used once for a short time period then thrown away. Guilford schools have abandoned Styrofoam trays and moved to 100% recycled paper trays. What is particularly special about using alternative recyclable products is that the advocates are the students themselves. The Connecticut school system teaches students of the importance of caring for the environment, while at the same time our schools are using massive amounts of plastics and Styrofoam.

*The Environment Committee received approximately 20 supporting testimonies explaining that (1) polystyrene products cannot be reused and are difficult to recycle, (2) polystyrene products are hazardous to wildlife and the environment, and (3) chemicals released from polystyrene products, when heated, are toxic and possibly carcinogenic.*

## **NATURE AND SOURCES OF OPPOSITION:**

**Connecticut Association of School Business Officials:** If this bill is enacted into legislation, School districts will have few good options implementing a ban on Styrofoam trays. An alternative are paper trays; however, these products cost three times more than Styrofoam trays, have limited product selections, and are not as durable for certain uses. Another alternative are reusable trays; however, many schools are not built to accommodate tray washing or the additional labor and utility costs that come along with this option. For many school districts, this proposal is another unfunded mandate.

**American Chemistry Council (ACC):** Environmental concerns regarding polystyrene and plastic products should be addressed through litter education prevention, waste minimization, and recycling. ACC opposes the bill for the following reasons: (1) a ban on polystyrene would have significant fiscal impacts on the state because it would mandate the use of alternatives, (2) alternatives to polystyrene products will not result in the use of more environmentally friendly products as all packaging leaves an environmental footprint regardless of material type, (3) biodegradable containers only biodegrade in a controlled composting environment, (4) polystyrene food service products are safe, low cost, and effective packaging products that have been approved by the US Food and Drug Administration, and (5) AAC supports polystyrene foam recycling programs such as the Foam Recycling Coalition.

### **American Chemistry Council's Plastics Foodservice Packaging Group (AAC/PFPG):**

This bill fails to recognize that litter and improper waste management are independent of material type and is unlikely to be effective in addressing litter. Litter studies on material bans have shown greater increases in the litter of alternative materials, than in the decline of a banned material. AAC/PFPG recommends that a full life cycle analysis of the environmental impacts of alternatives needs to be conducted before considering a ban on polystyrene foam. A full environmental study will reveal the truth behind many myths. An examples include (1) polystyrene foam cups requires 50% less energy to produce, effectively creating fewer greenhouse gas emissions, than similar coated paper products, and (2) most compostable foodservice containers only degrade in a controlled composting environment.

**Susan Maffe, President, School Nutrition Association of Connecticut:** Many schools currently have difficulty offsetting the cost of free and reduced meals served to school children and cannot afford the additional cost of alternative trays. Many Connecticut schools were not built to accommodate tray washing and have no dishwashing machines. Furthermore, alternate tray products are not readily available to schools in large quantities.

**Reported by: Steve Smith / Ussawin R. Bumpen    Date: 4/4/2019**