March 11, 2019

The Honorable Christine Cohen  
The Honorable Mike Demicco  
Co-Chairs, Environment Committee  
Legislative Office Building, Room 3200  
Hartford, CT 06106

RE: Opposition to SB 1003 and HB 5019

Chairperson Cohen, Chairperson Demicco, and members of the Environment Committee,

My name is Matt Seaholm, and on behalf of the American Progressive Bag Alliance (APBA), an organization that represents our country’s plastic retail bag manufacturers and recyclers, I would like to submit this statement for the record.

First, I would like to applaud the authors of SB 1003 and HB 5019 for taking seriously the goals of waste and litter reduction in Connecticut. I’d also like to extend my thanks for taking the time to consider the views of APBA and its members. Like you, we care deeply about environmental stewardship and sustainability, which is a primary reason why our members are pioneers in the field of plastic film recycling. Our members manufacture and promote the responsible use, reuse, recycling, and disposal of American-made plastic bags and support local sustainability initiatives across the country.

We share the committee’s goal of protecting the environment and keeping Connecticut beautiful. However, a ban or tax on a 100-percent recyclable, American-made product, which these bills aim to do, is the wrong approach. Here’s why:

**Plastic bag bans and taxes are regressive and will add costs to Connecticut residents at a time when they can least afford it.**

- Working class residents are already facing difficulty in this economy and can’t afford one more expense. A tax on bags is a regressive one, having the highest impact on those who can least afford it.
- Food prices have been rising each year, and according to the U.S. Department of Agriculture, they are expected to jump another 1-2 percent in 2019 – all while incomes remain stagnant.
- The 2018 United Way Asset Limited, Income Constrained, Employed (ALICE) report found that 40% of households in Connecticut could not afford basic needs, including housing and food. This should be the focus of our elected officials – not hurting jobs and driving up food costs by banning or taxing grocery bags.
Consumers will be pushed towards alternatives that are actually more harmful to the environment.

- Recent independent government studies comparing different bag options show that, in almost every instance, plastic grocery bags are the most environmentally friendly option available to consumers.
- Recyc-Québec, a government recycling agency based in Canada, released a study in December 2017, which found that the overall lifecycle of the plastic bag—from its production to the end of its life—has far less environmental impact compared with other bags. The study concludes, “Thin and light, [a plastic bag’s] production requires little material and energy,” and plastic bags have a 77.7% reuse rate as garbage bag/bin liners.
- Additionally, in a February 2018 study, Denmark’s Environmental Protection Agency concluded that lightweight plastic carrier bags provide “the absolute best environmental performance.” This same study found that a canvas bag has a significant carbon footprint, requiring nearly 3,000 reuses to offset its environmental impact.

Attacks on plastic bags are wrong. Limiting their use won’t have a major environmental impact. Recycling, and promoting recycling education, is the right answer for Connecticut.

- Plastic bags only make up a tiny fraction (0.3 percent) of the U.S. municipal solid waste stream.
- The most recent litter study in the United States was commissioned by the New Jersey Clean Communities Council, and it found that branded plastic retail bags made up just 0.8% of litter.
- American-made plastic retail bags are 100-percent recyclable and highly reused.
- Recycling addresses all plastic bags, sacks, and wraps, which can be recycled and manufactured into new products like decking, piping, or new bags – supporting jobs that already exist and creating potential for new ones in the recycling industry.
- In 2015, an estimated 1.2 billion pounds of plastic bags, sacks, and wraps were recycled.

In cities and states where wealth dichotomies are stark, prioritizing environmentally dubious legislation sends a message. Residents of Connecticut reuse their plastic bags. To impose a law that would take those bags away or introduce a regressive fee will not be well received. This legislation will only serve to make trips to the grocery store more expensive and inconvenient for Connecticut consumers without solving environmental concerns. Instead, Connecticut should partner with plastic bag manufacturers to encourage the highly-successful retailer take-back programs that properly address disposal, save consumers from higher costs at checkout, and aid in job creation in the recycling industry.

For more information about the record of plastic bag laws, plastic bag recycling, and the impact of plastic bag reuse, please do not hesitate to reach out. This topic is complex, and we hope our experience and insights can help inform your approach.

Sincerely,

Matt Seaholm
Executive Director, American Progressive Bag Alliance
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