Testimony to the CGA Environment Committee  
By Louis W. Burch  
Citizens Campaign for the Environment  
March 11, 2019  
Hartford, CT

Senators Cohen and Miner, Representative Demicco, distinguished vice chairs, ranking members and esteemed rank & file members of the CGA Environment Committee, thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony today.

My name is Louis Burch, Connecticut Program Director for Citizens Campaign for the Environment (CCE). Supported by over 80,000 members in Connecticut and New York, CCE works to empower communities and advocate for solutions that protect public health and the natural environment. I am here today to offer testimony in support of SB 1003, HB 5384, HB 5385, and HB 7294:

**SB 1003- AAC SINGLE-USE PLASTIC AND PAPER BAGS**
CCE supports any measure to reduce pollution from single-use plastic checkout bags. Plastic shopping bags are costly, environmentally harmful, and completely unnecessary. They are typically used for an average of 12 minutes, but have impacts on our environment that last for generations.

**The True Cost of Plastic Bags**
The free distribution of single-use checkout bags comes with significant economic and environmental costs to Connecticut, including littering our communities, polluting our waterways, threatening aquatic wildlife and damaging municipal infrastructure. Plastic bags are easily swept into storm drains where they lead to severe blockages and cause localized flooding. Additionally, plastic bags routinely become clogged in recycling infrastructure, which can force a municipal recovery facility (MRF) to shut down operations for up to 10.5 hours/week (up to 550 hours annually).

**The Problem with Paper**
Unfortunately, paper bags are not a suitable solution to plastic bags. Paper bags carry their own adverse impacts on our environment. Paper production is highly energy intensive, and the process requires large quantities of fresh water and natural resources. Paper bags take up unnecessary space in the municipal solid waste stream, a reality which only exacerbates the growing solid waste and recycling crisis in our state. Finally, paper checkout bags do nothing to change the throw-away culture that plastic bags perpetuate. This committee should not advance a policy that simply replaces one disposable bag with another- instead, **it should pass a bill that encourages consumers to bring their own bags when they go shopping!**

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1 Materials Innovation and Recovery Authority, Hartford, CT
The Most Effective Policy Solution for Curbing Plastic Bag Pollution: The Ban/Fee Hybrid

Some of the first communities to attempt to address plastic bag pollution adopted a straight ban on plastic bags, without addressing paper bag use. This approach resulted in unintended consequences in some areas:

- In Westport, CT, a survey of over 2,450 shoppers showed that over 50% of customers used “reusable” bags (including thicker plastic bags), roughly 45% of customers used paper bags, and only 2% of customers carried out with no bag. Compared to similar stores in areas unaffected by the ordinance, the ordinance increased paper bag usage significantly (from virtually no usage to approximately 45%)\(^2\).

- In San Francisco, a straight ban on plastic bags was implemented in 2007, only applying to large retail stores with over $2 million in annual sales. A survey of 25 stores found that the ordinance was ineffective at changing consumer behavior. Retailers switched to paper bags (or thicker plastic bags labeled “reusable”), and excessive double-bagging of paper bags was observed, with few people bringing bags of their own\(^3\).

In recent years, communities across the U.S. have begun adopting what are known as *second generation bag bans* - a ban on plastic bags with a charge on paper bags (sometimes referred to as a “ban/fee hybrid”). This approach has been demonstrated to be the most effective strategy at changing consumer behavior. The ban/fee hybrid model eliminates plastic shopping bags and *creates a financial incentive for consumers to use reusable bags instead of paper*. Successful examples include:

- The City of San Jose’s bag ban on thin plastic bags and 10-cent charge for paper bags resulted in the percentage of customers bringing their own reusable bags to the store going from 4% to 62%, reduced plastic bag pollution in storm drains by 89%, and reduced downtime in municipal solid waste (MSW) operations related to disruptions from plastic bags by up to 35-50% within a year of implementation\(^4\).

- In Alameda County, CA a ban on thin plastic bags and a fee on paper and reusable bags led to an 80% decline in the use of single-use paper and plastic bags, a 200% increase in the number of shoppers bringing reusable bags, or not using a bag at all, and a 44% decrease in plastic bags found in County storm drains\(^5\).

- A study examining Aspen’s two grocers covered by the City ordinance banning the use of single-use plastic checkout bags at Aspen supermarkets and mandating a 20-cent charge for single-use paper

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\(^2\) David Brown, Sc.D., Retail Checkout Bag Surveys Report, Westport, Connecticut (2010), available at https://static1.squarespace.com/static/59bd5150e45a7caf6bee56f8/t/5bd30cd0eef1a1d9bb2e0a1d/1540558032257/Westport+Retail+Checkout+Bag+Survey.pdf


\(^4\) Memorandum from Kerrie Romanow to the Transportation and Environment Committee, City of San Jose, California, Bring Your Own Bag Ordinance Implementation Results and Actions to Reduce EPS Foam Food Ware (November 21, 2012), available at http://www3.sanjoseca.gov/clerk/CommitteeAgenda/TE/20121203/TE20121203_d5.pdf

\(^5\) Alameda County Waste Management Authority, Reusable Bag Ordinance, Information for Shoppers, http://reusablebagsac.org/shoppers/information
bags found that 45% didn’t use any type of bag to carry out their purchases, another 40 percent used reusable bags, and 15% paid 20 cents per paper bag⁶.

CCE applauds this committee’s leadership on eliminating single-use plastic bags- they are a significant contributor to plastic pollution in our oceans and they exacerbate the emerging solid waste crisis in our state. **We respectfully urge this committee to pass legislation that eliminates plastic bags, with amendments that promote reusable bag use through a charge on paper bags.**

**HB 5384- AN ACT ELIMINATING POLYSTYRENE FOOD SERVICE CONTAINERS**

CCE strongly supports any legislation aimed at reducing polystyrene waste. In addition to increasing public exposure to Styrene (a likely carcinogen), expanded polystyrene (EPS) is a significant contributor to the plastic pollution crisis choking our marine environment. EPS packaging never fully breaks down in our water, instead, it breaks up into tiny pieces which persist for hundreds of years. These pieces are frequently mistaken for food and eaten by a wide range of marine species, including fish, sea turtles and aquatic birds.

Polystyrene waste also presents a problem for municipal recyclers. EPS foam cannot be easily recycled, if at all. Phasing out EPS foam carryout containers, cups and other types of packaging at food service establishments would make Connecticut a trailblazer in eliminating polystyrene waste. Cities and municipalities that have passed similar bans in the U.S. include New York City, Washington, D.C., Nantucket, MA, Portland, ME, Freeport, ME, Portland, OR, Seattle, WA, Los Angeles Co., CA, and San Francisco, CA. **CCE strongly supports HB 5384, to prohibit food service establishments from distributing single-use EPS foam containers. Further, we appreciate and support SB 229, which would prohibit the use of EPS food service trays in Connecticut schools.**

**HB 5385- AN ACT ELIMINATING SINGLE-USE PLASTIC STRAWS**

Single-use food service items such as plastic straws and stirrers are wasteful, unnecessary, and they have impacts on our environment that last for generations. Plastic straws are frequently discarded improperly, and they do not break down once they escape into the environment. Tiny plastic fragments (known as *microplastics*) from straws and other single-use plastics make up as much as 85% of all the plastic pollution found on shorelines across the world⁷. These microplastics affect more than 250 marine and avian species⁸, and they create a legacy of plastic pollution that devastates our oceans and waterways for generations to come.

According to the Ocean Conservancy, plastic straws and stirrers are the 7th most common type of plastic ocean pollution collected at beach cleanup activities worldwide.⁹ The good news is that plastic straws are another unnecessary disposable item for which there are cost effective, environmentally friendly alternatives. A single reusable straw can be used hundreds of times, virtually eliminating the need for wasteful plastic straws.

CCE supports any legislation aimed at promoting a reusable consumer culture. HB 5385 does not penalize food service establishments for keeping plastic straws on hand for its customers, it simply prevents those establishments from distributing or making them readily available as a matter of policy. This common-sense approach is a good first step to encourage consumers to bring their own straws, and

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⁷ [https://www.pbs.org/wgbh/nova/article/freshwater-microplastics/](https://www.pbs.org/wgbh/nova/article/freshwater-microplastics/)

⁸ [https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC2873013/](https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC2873013/)

we encourage the committee to continue exploring policy options to eliminate the use of plastic straws, stirrers and other plastic utensils at food service establishments.

**HB 7294- AAC BOTTLE REDEMPTION IN CONNECTICUT**

CCE strongly supports expansion of Connecticut’s container deposit law (AKA “the bottle bill”). Since 1980, Connecticut’s bottle bill has successfully captured millions of tons of recyclable beverage containers, while creating an efficient market for recycled aluminum, glass and PET plastic. The bottle bill is one of the earliest examples of Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR), which produces real cost savings for municipalities that would otherwise be responsible for collecting and recycling containers. According to the Container Recycling Institute (CRI), Connecticut’s bottle bill saves taxpayers and businesses roughly $2.3 million in avoided solid waste disposal costs annually. Those savings could increase by up to $200,000 per year just by adding non-carbonated beverages to the deposit system.

**Modernizing Connecticut’s Bottle Bill**

National recycling data demonstrates that refundable container deposits are a proven, effective system for collecting and recycling beverage containers. According to CRI, roughly 46% of beverage containers recycled in the U.S. came from the 10 bottle bill states- even though they account for roughly 28% of the U.S. population. Unfortunately, Connecticut’s redemption rate is the lowest in the world, compared to other territories with container deposit systems in place. The program is in dire need of an update, and as a result it has failed to produce optimal results.

According to DEEP, Connecticut’s redemption rate on beverage containers covered by the law is at or below 50%. This is a 20% drop in container recycling from where the state was just 10 years ago. This decline is mainly due to outdated economics and other components of the law which urgently need to be addressed in order to stabilize this important recycling program:

- **Increasing the Value of Connecticut’s Bottle Deposit**
  Refundable container deposits work because they create a financial incentive (similar to a bounty), that encourages consumers to return used beverage containers for recycling. Connecticut’s bottle bill was implemented in 1980, and established a 5 cent refundable deposit on single-serve carbonated beverages up to 3 liters in volume. Unfortunately, that deposit value has not been increased over time, which results in a weaker and less effective incentive to recycle, relative to other bottle bill states. The State of Michigan (which has a 10 cent deposit) reported a return rate of over 91% in 2017\(^\text{10}\). Similarly the State of Oregon’s container deposit program underwent a modernization in 2017, including expansion to more beverage categories, and raising the deposit value to 10 cents per container. As a result, Oregon’s redemption rate is expected to exceed 90% for 2018\(^\text{11}\).

- **Increasing Handling Fees Paid to Redemption Centers**
  Handling fees paid by the distributor for each container collected have not been adjusted since 1986, and they remain well below the fair market value paid to retailers and redemption centers in our neighboring states\(^\text{12}\). This has made it increasingly difficult for Connecticut redemption centers to remain profitable. As a result, fewer than 20 full service

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>State</th>
<th>Handling Fees</th>
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<tr>
<td>CT</td>
<td><em>Beer - 1.5¢</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><em>Soda, Water - 2¢</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ME</td>
<td>3.5 - 4¢</td>
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<tr>
<td>MA</td>
<td>2.25¢ - 3.25¢</td>
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<tr>
<td>NY</td>
<td>3.5¢</td>
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<td>VT</td>
<td>3.5 - 4¢</td>
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\(^\text{10}\) [http://www.bottlebill.org/legislation/usa/michigan.htm#notea](http://www.bottlebill.org/legislation/usa/michigan.htm#notea)


\(^\text{12}\) [http://www.bottlebill.org/legislation/usa/history/cthis.htm](http://www.bottlebill.org/legislation/usa/history/cthis.htm)
redemption centers remain in business in Connecticut today! This leaves consumers with fewer convenient options for container recycling, which contributes to our declining recycling rate and puts increased pressure on grocery stores and retail establishments to pick up the slack.

Expanding the Bottle Bill to Capture More Materials
Connecticut’s bottle bill was expanded in 2009 to include plastic water bottles, which were the fastest growing beverage category on the market at the time. Unfortunately, the program has not been updated since to capture the wide array of juices, teas, sports drinks and other non-carbonated beverages that have grown in popularity in recent years. According to the CRI, expansion to non-carbonated beverages could increase container recycling by up to 193 million additional units each year. This would significantly reduce pressure on the municipal solid waste (MSW) stream and produce tremendous environmental benefits by reducing litter. Additionally, the expanded bottle bill could generate $7.5 million in additional revenue to the State of Connecticut each year, which could be used to help fund recycling infrastructure.

Getting Glass Out of Curbside Single Stream
According to DEEP, glass wine and liquor bottles account for roughly 60% of the curbside single stream. Glass continues to present a problem for municipal recyclers; it is easily shattered and becomes a major source of contamination in the curbside recycling stream. As a result, curbside glass is significantly more expensive to process than clean, uniform bottle bill glass, and carries a higher commodity price per ton to process. As a result, the majority of glass collected through Connecticut’s curbside programs is trucked out of state as landfill cover, instead of being recycled properly.

Connecticut can significantly increase glass recycling statewide and provide relief to municipalities by expanding the bottle bill to include glass wine & liquor bottles. According to CRI, putting a refundable deposit on wine and liquor bottles could increase glass recycling in Connecticut by more than 31,000 tons. This would be a significant improvement over the 6,000 tons of glass wine and liquor bottles currently being collected at curbside.

CCE strongly supports legislation to modernize Connecticut’s bottle bill for the 21st century, and we applaud this committee for its leadership on this important issue. For years, the bottle bill has been an effective tool to reduce litter and incentivize recycling in our communities, but the system is long overdue for an update. We respectfully urge the committee to pass this important legislation as soon as possible, so as to prevent any further decline of this critical recycling program.

Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony on these important issues. We appreciate your consideration and look forward to working with the committee on these initiatives moving forward.