March 11, 2019

Greetings Co-Chair Cohen, Co-Chair Demicco, and distinguished members of the Environment Committee:

The Surfrider Foundation has been working to protect America’s coasts for over 35 years; we have 140 chapters and youth clubs across the coastal US and Great Lakes who are supported by a staff of about 50 experts. Our members here in Connecticut are beach goers, surfers, Standup paddleboarders, kayakers, sand castle builders and the like – we are beach users. Our common point of interest is a vision for healthy ocean and coastal ecosystems, and a motivation to volunteer to protect our state’s ocean waters and beaches through focus on beach access, clean water, climate change, coastal preservation, ocean protection and plastic pollution mitigation. Here in Connecticut, we have been working to mitigate single-use plastic pollution for several years, helping to pass local bag legislation in Westport, Greenwich, Norwalk, and Stamford, and we thank the Committee for bringing forth several exciting plastic mitigation bills at the State level this session.

The primary objective of the Surfrider Foundation’s plastic pollution initiative is to stop plastic pollution at the source to protect the marine environment, and we aspire to effect change in a way that does not shift the pollution problem from plastic to paper or any other material manufactured for single-use, by steadfastly and concurrently working toward promoting the waste stream hierarchy of refuse first, then reduce, re-use, and finally recycle, ushering forth the consumer paradigm shift from single-use items to sustainable re-use.

Although it may seem like pollution from straws is not a big deal, the 2017 International Coastal Cleanup report found that straws were one of the top ten items collected globally on our coastlines. Made of polystyrene, polypropylene and polyethylene, straws contribute greatly to the epidemic of plastic pollution in our oceans, and we find them in spades at our beach cleanups across Connecticut.

Marine life, including sea turtles, can be harmed by ingesting plastic straws and broken down plastic polluting our ocean and waterways. In one upsetting highly publicized recent incident, an endangered Olive Ridley sea turtle was found with a four inch plastic straw lodged in his nasal cavity, inhibiting his breathing and sense of smell, critical to his ability to find food.

As toxins from marine plastic pollution make their way up the food chain, it poses a dangerous threat to humans and wildlife who consume them, and can lead to health problems including birth defects, cancer, and learning and growth deficits in children. Many plastics contain chemicals that leach out, especially when exposed to weathering, heat, or UV light. This additionally presents danger to human health when swimming, paddling and recreating in our waters.

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2 http://marinedebris.noaa.gov/sites/default/files/Gen_Plastic-HI_9-20-11_0.pdf
3 See http://www.plasticpollutioncoalition.org/pft/2015/10/27/the-turtle-that-became-the-anti-plastic-straw-poster-child
Straws are easier to mitigate than any other single-use plastic, because they aren’t a necessary means for most people to consume a beverage. In fact, most people don’t even ask for a straw and are instead given one automatically. This wasteful behavior is what HB5385 would correct. **Importantly, nothing in HB5385 would prohibit a customer from bringing their own straw of choice with them, including a single-use plastic straw.**

While the Surfrider Foundation has supported straws upon request bills in other states, we much prefer the mechanism set forth in HB5385 to ban single-use plastic straws, encouraging businesses to have reusable straws on hand, or single-use straws constructed of natural materials, such as paper, bamboo, or hay, to be made available only upon request or for sale. **HB5385 is a common sense solution for helping curb one of the top ten sources of single-use plastic pollution found on our beaches and waterways,** and we urge your support.

The Surfrider Foundation and our Connecticut Chapter extend thanks to Representative Reyes for bringing forth this important bill, and to the Committee for considering our recommendation to support HB5385.

Thank you.

Sincerely,

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