I am urging your support for HB 5395, AN ACT REQUIRING AN EVALUATION OF THE STATE’S ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE LAW. Research has clearly documented that poor communities of color have been burdened with a disproportionate share of locally undesirable land uses, such as waste treatment facilities, polluting power plants, etc. These communities have suffered numerous health impacts as a result. Local property values are depressed, discouraging investment in the community to their further disadvantage. I particularly support the change of “may” to “shall” in section 1(b)(2) and the provision in 1(c) that any municipality that hosts five or more affecting facilities “shall” enter into a community environmental benefit agreement.

I am also encouraged by the inclusion of more proactive means of mitigating some of the negative effects, such as wellness clinics, or programs to reduce asthma. We need to think more creatively. For example, air pollution is a major contributor to pulmonary diseases. Tree planting can help clean the air, reduce impacts of stormwater runoff, and reduce heat island effects in urban areas. I firmly believe that many of the potential community city benefit agreements could provide net gains to the municipality or state by providing enough health care savings and other environmental benefits to offset the cost of the agreement.

This is a common sense proposal that can help establish a more equitable sharing of the costs and benefits of economic development. The reality is that CT has an aging infrastructure in need of investment. It will be extremely difficult to develop a new green field sites for this infrastructure. Many of the affecting facilities will need to be upgraded. The host communities deserve more support through the environmental justice program to help mitigate the burdens they carry on behalf of the rest of the state.

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Everything that irritates us about others can lead us to an understanding of ourselves.
Carl Jung