Testimony Submitted by Commissioner Katie S. Dykes

HB 7295 – An Act Concerning a Recycling Program for Paper and Packaging and Requiring Certain Municipal Solid Waste Management Goals

Thank you for the opportunity to present testimony regarding H.B. No. 7295 – An Act Concerning a Recycling Program for Paper and Packaging and Requiring Certain Municipal Solid Waste Management Goals. The purposes of this bill are to provide opportunity for a producer-financed recycling program for packaging and paper in the state and to update certain solid waste reduction goals of municipalities.

We appreciate the Committee’s willingness to raise this bill at the request of the Department of Energy and Environmental Protection (DEEP). This proposal is intended to address the growing cost of recycling and waste disposal, now being borne by towns and taxpayers, by engaging the producers of paper goods and packaging in developing more cost-effective recycling programs, and shifting municipal planning targets from recycling rates to a waste reduction metric. The proposed bill is consistent with State policy set forth in the Comprehensive Materials Management Strategy (CMMS) and underlying statutes establishing the solid waste management hierarchy for prioritization of and need to “Reduce, Reuse, and Recycle” instead of disposing of solid waste.

Section 1 requires that producers of paper packaging materials – which would include major consumer brands that market products with packaging in the state – to develop plans, together or separately, to fund recycling programs. Those plans would be submitted to the General Assembly, along with recommendations from DEEP, by 2021. The General Assembly would have the option to act on the recommendations or allow them to go into effect. Importantly, this proposal emphasizes that existing systems of collection and facilities must be integrated into any resulting program. This way, existing businesses built around the current system and cost structure can be assured of continued opportunity under any enhanced recycling program. The ultimate objective of this section is to ensure that those companies that are responsible for creating the products that are driving recycling costs—and are best positioned to make choices about packaging design that can affect those costs—are paying the cost of recycling, rather than the cities, towns, businesses, and individual residents that currently bear that cost burden. And while DEEP would expect the recycling costs to be incorporated to some extent into product prices, market competition among producers to offer products at the lowest cost to consumers will incent more sustainable packaging design. This approach, in sum, is aimed to engage product-producing companies in finding solutions as a highly cost-effective way to achieve recycling goals.

Section 2 repeals language referring to a municipal recycling rate goal and replaces it with targets aimed at waste reduction. The proposed 2022 target is 700 pounds of Municipal Solid
Waste (MSW) per capita. This is close to the current state average (approx. 740 pounds) and over half of municipalities in the state have already achieved this benchmark. The proposed 2024 target of 500 pounds of Municipal Solid Waste (MSW) per capita is consistent with levels achieved by Massachusetts municipalities that have implemented unit-based pricing. We have provided the Committee with suggested language to make clear that DEEP does not intend to penalize municipalities that do not reach these goals.

Connecticut faces a stark choice. Absent an estimated $1 billion in investment in new system capacity, we must reduce waste by 10 percent overall by 2024 or suffer an escalation of the already-occurring economic and environmental consequences of reliance on out-of-state landfilling. While DEEP and the State are investigating options to improve our municipal solid waste and recycling infrastructure statewide, we recognize that municipalities are critical partners in efforts to reduce waste, which will have the dual benefit of reducing costs for municipalities and their taxpayers. Municipalities have much greater and more direct control over waste management within their boundaries than does the State. Faced with a crisis in system cost and capacity, DEEP looks forward to supporting municipalities with technical assistance, policy insights, and funding if available to enable them to utilize the best strategies available to reduce waste generation. The Department understands the magnitude of the challenges faced by cities and towns and look forward to working in a collaborative manner to make progress wherever it is possible.

Section 3 clarifies that collectors (sometimes called haulers) will report to the State all quantities of waste and recyclables they transport. This will provide much needed data for state and municipal planners to better understand trends in waste generation at the state and local level. If successfully implemented, it will be possible in future years to greatly streamline or even eliminate the requirement that collectors report this same information to municipalities in which they are registered. Requirements that collectors report tonnages to municipalities, which are already in statute, have proven to be inconsistently implemented.

Section 4 commits DEEP, within budgeted resources, to provide technical assistance to municipalities for organics management, waste reduction and improvements to recycling systems. We believe that to achieve progress, DEEP must do more to support municipal efforts.

Thank you for the opportunity to present testimony on this proposal. Should you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact Mandi Careathers, the Department’s legislative liaison, at Mandi.Careathers@ct.gov.