The Connecticut Conference of Municipalities (CCM) is Connecticut’s statewide association of towns and cities and the voice of local government - your partners in governing Connecticut. Our members represent 99% of Connecticut’s population. We appreciate the opportunity to testify on bills of interest to towns and cities.

H.B. 7295 “An Act Concerning a Recycling Program for Paper and Packaging and Requiring Certain Municipal Solid Waste Management Goals.”

In 2017, the Chinese Government announced The National Sword, a policy that limits the kind of recyclables the country accepts. No longer will China take on what it terms “foreign garbage,” limiting the amount of impurities in recyclables in order to protect its own environment, which is the world’s most polluted (rated by CO2 emissions, America is number two).

SECTION 1
CCM supports Section 1 of H.B. 7295 as it seeks to establish an EPR (Extended Producer Responsibility) program for packaging and paper in the state. We appreciate lines 35-36 that seek to preserve, “to the extent it is technologically feasible and economically practical” (lines 32-33) existing collection methods (e.g. our existing recycling programs).

As a result of China’s new policy, certain recyclables like mixed papers and plastics are now considered contaminated, and are required to be sorted out. This not only increases facilities costs in sorting the products, but the ability of those facilities to sell the products.

The effects of the National Sword decision have focused local government’s attention on, among other solutions, EPR for packaging and paper as a waste reduction and financing option. There are three main factors that have highlighted the need for an EPR solution; (1) recycled commodities markets have experienced a rapid downturn and general uncertainty, (2) the changing mix of the packaging material stream has been defined by shifts away from traditional recyclable materials and toward low-value, flexible plastic packaging materials and (3) there is a growing recognition that local governments are seeing increased costs in response to plastic pollution.

Those factors are among the many placing local governments in the state on the hook for the expanding costs of managing packaging materials, especially plastics. The current slump in recycling markets has helped draw attention to the fact that taxpayers and ratepayers bear the primary risk of any downturn in the value of collected material. When recycled commodities markets slide, additional taxpayer or ratepayer subsidization of community recycling programs is
required. In the era of ongoing budget crises, the value of recycling has been increasingly called into question, and some communities are now being forced to pay for rather than be paid for these materials.

The price tag and logistical challenges of dealing with packaging materials – through collection, recycling, disposal, waterway and beach cleanup, street sweeping, storm water capture, and outreach and education – are spiraling upward. Local governments are beginning to look to the companies that produce packaging in the first place to pay their fair share in managing the material. In an EPR system, the risk of down or collapsed markets is on industry, not on communities.

For all the reasons stated, CCM supports the creation of an EPR system for packaging and paper as outlined in Section 1 of H.B. 7295, as this system will be better financed and managed overall and will provide the needed financial relief local communities so desperately need.

SECTION 2
CCM opposes Section 2 of H.B. 7295, as drafted, as an unfunded mandate on municipal solid waste systems. At a time when local recycling operations have moved from a revenue generator to a growing expense, CCM is disappointed that the Department of Energy and Environmental Protection (DEEP) would seek to impose additional requirements on our local governments. That being said, we do agree that waste reduction should be part of the overall solution to reduce rising local costs.

In a press release from Monday, March 4, 2019, CCM called on the Governor and the General Assembly to prohibit the passage of any new recycling mandates on municipalities until local markets are established to manage recyclable materials. Section 2 flies in the face of this simple request.

While we remain frustrated, CCM supports and acknowledges the Departments efforts to amend the language, as outlined by the Commissioner today, to move away from the use of a “stick” and rather to encourage goals towards waste reduction standards.

CCM supports the following amendment language, proposed by DEEP, to Section 2 of H.B. 7295:

*(NEW) It shall be the goal of each municipality, for planning purposes, to dispose annually of not more than seven hundred pounds per capita from residential sources of municipal solid waste by January 1, 2022, and not more than five hundred pounds per capita from such sources by January 1, 2024. Failure to meet such goals shall not provide a basis for the commissioner to issue an order under Sections 22a-220, 22a-225 and 22a-241e.*

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If you have any questions, please contact Donna Hamzy Carroccia, Advocacy Manager of CCM at dhamzy@ccm-ct.org or (203) 843-0705.