Senator Christine Cohen  
Representative Mike Demico  
Co-Chairs, Environment Committee of the CT General Assembly  
Legislative Office Building  
300 Capitol Avenue  
Hartford, CT 01106

Testimony on behalf of the Town of Wallingford  
HB 7298

Senator Cohen, Representative Demico, and members of the Environment Committee, as Mayor, I represent the Town of Wallingford and wish to express support of HB 7289, which includes important provisions to improve efficiencies of state government, eliminate duplicative steps currently practiced by many cities and towns with respect to reporting requirements established by the Department of Energy and Environmental Protection ("Department"), and acknowledge that the marketplace has changed for many materials we previously recognized as curbside residential recyclables.

The impact of recent trade restrictions and market conditions on municipalities throughout North America is truly unprecedented. Today's market is volatile, with limited opportunity for some of the materials routinely collected curbside. It is becoming increasingly challenging to maintain these programs, complicated by recent extended outages at MIRA's Mid-Connecticut waste to energy facility, which results in diversion of over 50,000 tons of municipal solid waste to other in-state, as well as out-of-state facilities.

In light of the recent crises related to Connecticut's shortfall in disposal capacity and collapse of recycling markets, legislation is needed to direct the Department to revisit state policies and priorities, particularly with respect to how cities and towns provide important services to taxpayers. Initiatives proposed in HB 7298 will take into account a more pragmatic approach to managing solid waste and recyclables in the absence of robust markets for many materials formerly exported to Southeast Asia. With no viable markets in North America, our citizens and taxpayers now bear the brunt of paying for services we are no longer able to provide as before.

It is vital to our budgeting and finance responsibilities to establish certainty with respect to undertaking capital projects, thus we heartily support the ninety day turnaround time for permitting municipal environmental projects. We appreciate the approach proposed in the bill to make the reporting process transparent for our public works officials. And in conclusion we note the review of the Department's implementation of the 2016 state solid waste management plan is a welcome opportunity to affirm whether the bold initiatives launched with passage of Public Act 14-94 have been fruitful.
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HB 7295

We are discouraged by language in HB 7295 which would grant the Commissioner of the Department increased authority to subjectively penalize cities and towns for “making insufficient progress in implementing a recycling and waste reduction program...” We believe such a determination could rely upon entirely subjective information without clear, measurable parameters. The cities and towns of Connecticut have done well at providing convenient and cost effective waste management services, especially when considering the age of our existing waste facilities. The possibility of enforcement against a municipality for failing to meet ambiguous goals is unlikely to contribute to the desperate need for infrastructure improvement.

HB 7295 proposes unfortunate reliance on metrics which involve substantial uncertainty, for example, pounds per capita. We do not have the ability to accurately measure all of the pounds of waste generated by the residents of the Town of Wallingford. Further, one of our sister communities in our five town regional agency (Cheshire, Hamden, Meriden, North Haven and Wallingford) experiences substantial population fluctuations over time with a transient rental housing stock.

We do not understand the benefit of granting additional authority to the Commissioner to “enforce” provisions of the state solid waste plan. No clear argument has been presented to the cities and towns of Connecticut that enforcement will solve the state’s waste management dilemma. Rather, we need to understand this is a systemic problem deeply rooted in the absence of a robust infrastructure. Therefore, we strongly recommend the Legislature work with the Executive branch and the Commissioner to emphasize that agency resources focus more attention on issuing permits and promoting a healthy, economically sustainable, practical approach which will not place additional burdens upon already stressed communities.

Sincerely,

[Signature]

William W. Dickinson, Jr.
Mayor

cc: Senator Len Fasano
Representative Liz Linehan
Representative Vincent J. Candelora
Representative Craig Fishbein
Representative Mary Mushinsky