Thank you Madame Chair, Mr. Chairman, and members of the environment committee, for allowing me to be here today. My name is Kruttika Gopal, and I am a senior at Jonathan Law High School in Milford, Connecticut. I co-founded the Environmental Club at my school alongside my friend Ming-May. Next year I will be pursuing a degree in political science and environmental studies. Today, I will be speaking in strong support of Senate Bill 229 that bans the use of polystyrene, or Styrofoam, lunch trays in Connecticut schools. Growing up here, polystyrene trays, cups, and bowls have always been a common part of my life. From family parties to dance recitals, Styrofoam containers were ever-present, and as a child, I never thought much of it. However, as I grew up and started learning about the dangers associated with Styrofoam, I began noticing it everywhere. It fills our trash bins at school, and floats on top of the water at our local Walnut Beach where I go to swim with my friends. Thinking of not only how it gets eaten by animals, leaving them poisoned and suffering due to the inability to digest it, but also the environmental impact with the contaminants it brings into the water, horrifies me. Polystyrene persists in our environment, and there is no sustainable way to get rid of it. It is not recyclable and not biodegradable, as it gets even harder to clean up as it breaks into smaller pieces. If it is incinerated, like it is at my school, it will release fossil fuels and chemicals into the air. The effects are not only ecologically detrimental, but are also extremely harmful to humans--especially the students eating from these platters in our own schools. The chemicals can leach
into our food, especially when it is hot or acidic, such as the small Styrofoam cups of warm soup provided in some school lunches. It adds an unwanted dose of toxins to the lunches that our school systems have tried so hard to make healthier. Contrary to popular belief, there is an economically viable alternative to polystyrene plates. We have the contact information for the Northeast Region representative of the Huhtamäki food packaging and labeling company, which manufactures compostable paper trays for the Urban Food Alliance. This group is responsible for the materials of many big cities including Philadelphia and Dallas. Because they source their trays together from one location, the price is almost the same as that of polystyrene ones. Our contact, the Northeast Region product manager, has said that if bought in bulk, we could get a comparable price for the same compostable trays. Therefore, if this bill were to pass, all of Connecticut’s schools could have access to cheap, safe, and eco-friendly trays. The financial impact of changing this is incomparable to the long term environmental and health effects. I hope you consider the ideas I have shared today, and I thank you so much for taking the time to listen to me.

Sincerely,

Kruttika Gopal