Madame Chair, Mr. Chairman, and members of the Environment Committee, thank you for allowing me to speak today. My name is Ming-May Hu, and I am a senior at Jonathan Law High School in Milford, Connecticut. I co-founded the Environmental Club at my school and will be pursuing a degree in environmental engineering next year. I am speaking today in strong support of Senate Bill 229, which will prohibit the use of expanded polystyrene foam lunch trays in Connecticut schools. I have been a part of the public school system all of my life and have seen first hand the mass amount of these trays that are used every day and simply tossed in the trash. Seeing this truly worries me about the harmful environmental impact my school is making and about the health of the students. All of our school’s trash is incinerated. This means that toxic pollutants from the polystyrene are released into our atmosphere as well as carbon dioxide. Even if the trays were not burned, the polystyrene would build up in landfills and our oceans and lakes, as they can persist in the environment for over one million years. Furthermore, styrene monomers, which are known to cause nerve damage, hormonal disruption, and possibly cancer, are the building blocks of polystyrene. Every time we eat from these trays, especially with hot food, some styrene and chemical additives can be leached into the food we ingest. As an elementary school student I remember that my friends and I would play with the trays by scraping them with forks or breaking off small pieces, which could add to the amount of chemicals we ate. There are no definitive studies about the adverse health effects of the trays, but
why would we risk the safety of thousands of children when there is a much safer and more eco-friendly option? Many cities throughout the United States have banned polystyrene lunch trays including New York City, Washington D.C., Los Angeles, Seattle, and even Guilford, Connecticut. They have found other options such as cardboard trays or ones made from recycled paper fibers. Students see no difference between the polystyrene rays and alternative ones, and I know that I and many others would actually feel safer if we had a different option. Using a biodegradable tray will prevent the release of harmful chemicals and be a kickstart for other green programs in schools like composting. The only reason our school districts continue to use these dangerous and environmentally degrading trays is because they want to save money. But, there are many economically friendly options. Philadelphia uses compostable trays that are just one cent more than the traditional polystyrene trays. In addition, if the cardboard trays for all of our school districts are sourced from one manufacturer, the price will be driven down. Together we can create greener and healthier schools with a simple change in the type of lunch trays we use. I, along with many students at my school, are asking you to please consider the importance of this bill and put it into effect as soon as possible. Thank you.

Sincerely,

Ming-May Hu