March 11, 2019

Greetings Co-Chair Cohen, Co-Chair Demicco, and distinguished members of the Environment Committee:

The Surfrider Foundation has been working to protect America’s coasts for over 35 years; we have 140 chapters and youth clubs across the coastal US and Great Lakes who are supported by a staff of about 50 experts. Our members here in Connecticut are beach goers, surfers, Standup paddleboarders, kayakers, sand castle builders and the like – we are beach users. Our common point of interest is a vision for healthy ocean and coastal ecosystems, and a motivation to volunteer to protect our state’s ocean waters and beaches through focus on beach access, clean water, climate change, coastal preservation, ocean protection and plastic pollution mitigation. Here in Connecticut, we have been working to mitigate single-use plastic pollution for several years, helping to pass local bag legislation in Westport, Greenwich, Norwalk, and Stamford, and we thank the Committee for bringing forth several exciting plastic mitigation bills at the State level this session.

As Raised Bill 1003 sets forth to ban single-use plastic bags, the Surfrider Foundation Connecticut Chapter asserts preference for that bill ONLY insofar as all of the amendments we recommended in testimony per that bill are adopted. However, we offer additional support ONLY WITH AMENDMENTS for House Bill 5019, to mitigate pollution from single-use bags in the State.

The amendments we request are:

• Modifying the fee mechanism from a tax to a pass-thru fee retained 100% by the business for all types of single-use and reusable bags sold;
• Increasing the fee from 5-cents to 15-cents per bag sold.

“Pass-thru” fee simply means that the business providing the bag for sale would retain 100% of the fee for that bag. With a pass-thru fee, retailers recuperate the cost of purchasing the bag and that fee is then charged to the customer in the same way as all other goods at point of sale, in a transparent way itemized on the sale receipt rather than what traditionally happens, in that the cost of the bag is built into the cost of goods sold, and so hidden. All the pass-thru fee changes from traditional bag dispensing at point of sale is that if customers choose to buy a bag to transport their purchased goods, the transaction is transparently itemized on their receipt rather than being built into the other goods purchased.

For more information please contact the Surfrider Foundation’s Northeast Regional Manager, Melissa Gates: mgates@surfrider.org | 207.706.6378
To avoid triggering tax law, a pass-thru fee allows consumers the option to opt out of the fee and any fees collected at point of sale are retained by the business and not the town or state government. This allows proper consumer incentive while additionally supporting businesses through the transition away from single-use bags.

Additionally, assessing a mandatory, minimum fee for all “reusable” and “singe-use” bags provided at point of sale ensures that film plastic bags of any thickness specification are not given out for free, thereby contravening the intents of the legislation.

The Surfrider Foundation and our Connecticut Chapter extend thanks again to the Environment Committee for bringing forth this important bill, and considering our amendments to pass good state bag policy here in Connecticut, leading the way for other states to follow.

Thank you.

Sincerely,

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