Testimony on HB 5019 and RSB 1003
Regarding A Proposed Statewide Ban On Single-Use Plastic Bags
By John C. Hall, Executive Director
On Behalf of the Jonah Center Board of Directors

The Jonah Center is working to promote a local ordinance in the City of Middletown to ban single-use checkout plastic bags within our municipality. We support state legislation that would ban such bags throughout Connecticut.

Our concern is that HB 5019 and RSB 1003 present some potential conflicts with the details of local ordinances such as the one under consideration in Middletown and already enacted in other Connecticut municipalities.

The goal of any legislation on plastic and paper bags should be to incentivize shoppers to bring their own bags into stores with them. A charge of 5 cents for a bag would not have as great a positive impact toward this goal as an outright ban would have.

Furthermore, a 5 cent tax on paper bags would presumably be imposed on top of the 10 cent charge for paper bags required by common local ordinances—a charge meant to stay with the retailer to compensate for the high cost (approx. 8 cents) of each recycled-paper bag. This would add up to a charge to the customer of 15 cents per paper bag, of which the retailer would then have to remit 5 cents per bag to the Dept. of Revenue Services as a tax. We are concerned that HB 5019 would not accomplish enough in terms of reducing plastic bag use, and it would impose a burden upon retailers that could undermine support and compliance with the measure.

RSB 1003 would be far preferable, inasmuch as it bans single-use plastic bags outright. But RSB 1003 fails to require any charge for a 40% recycled paper bag. Our local ordinance, as stated above, requires a 10 cent charge for such recycled paper checkout bags, so as to encourage shoppers to bring their own multiple-use bags. Furthermore, we would propose, contrary to RSB 1003, that retailers should not be required to have printed and “displayed conspicuously” on the bag the words “Please Recycle and Reuse This Bag.” This requirement seems to overly complicate the situation for retailers while promising minimal positive impact toward eliminating the problems caused by single-use plastic bags.

Our mission: to foster sustainable relationships among people, other creatures, energy resources, and the environment and to promote interdisciplinary community partnerships in scientific, artistic, and other cultural endeavors.