



SIERRA CLUB

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Testimony Before the Environment Committees on 2.27.23

Dear Environment Chairs Lopes and Gresko, Vice-Chairs Hochadel and Palm, Ranking Members Harding and Callahan, and distinguished members of the Environment Committee,

On behalf of the Sierra Club and our more than 40,000 members and supporters in Connecticut, thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony today.

The Sierra Club is committed to defending everyone's right to a healthy world by tackling the serious challenges of a warming climate, unprecedented levels of pollution, the waste management crisis, biodiversity loss, and the dangers of toxics.

SB 979 An Act Promoting Energy Affordability, Energy Efficiency and Green Cities

Sierra Club Connecticut supports SB 979 which proposes a number of important things to promote clean energy, sustainable buildings, energy efficiency and urban tree coverage.

Energy transparency for renters, Section 2 of the bill, will provide renters with data on the energy consumption of a property so that they can make an informed decision before renting. This policy will help renters understand the full cost of occupying a property, and will incentivize landlords to improve the energy efficiency of their properties. It is a policy that helps address climate, affordability and equity issues.

Energy affordability is a significant issue in Connecticut; with low-income households, communities of color, renters and older adults experiencing disproportionately higher energy burdens than the average household in our state. Nationally, the median renter energy burden is 13% higher than that of the median owner (3.4% versus 3.0%). Energy transparency can provide renters with useful information on energy costs to help protect against energy burden. Energy data will also result in more efficient buildings as building owners seek to improve the efficiency of their buildings to attract renters. Improving efficiency will reduce energy use; a reduction in energy use will reduce climate-destroying greenhouse gas emissions.

Section 4 of the bill establishes a building stretch code for voluntary adoption by municipalities, allowing municipalities to have higher building standards than the base code. Higher standards will result in more efficient buildings and help reduce emissions from buildings by using less energy. Buildings are a major source of greenhouse gas emissions, and addressing building emissions is a critical step in dealing with the climate crisis and to achieve the carbon emission reductions needed to meet our state's decarbonization goals. All new buildings constructed today should be all-electric and zero-emissions in order to stop expanding the use of fossil fuels. Sierra Club recommends that the language be amended to require all-electric, zero emission new construction in the stretch code.

Massachusetts has allowed municipalities to adopt stretch codes since 2009, and has since updated the stretch code via legislation and a development process that involved stakeholder input.



HB 5123- AN ACT CONCERNING THE USE OF CERTAIN ANIMALS IN TRAVELING ANIMAL ACTS

Sierra Club Connecticut supports HB 5123. Now is the time to take action to end this exploitation and cruel treatment of these animals. Six states (California, Hawaii, Illinois, New Jersey, New York, Colorado) already ban or restrict the use of wild animals in traveling exhibitions and circuses. There are many animal-free shows that provide humane alternatives, while also providing jobs for talented performers. This abuse of animals is not only inhumane, but also poses threats to human safety, creates additional burdens for law enforcement agencies, jeopardizes conservation efforts and sends the message to our children that it is acceptable to mistreat and exploit animals for personal enjoyment.

Trainers often use violent and inhumane methods to force animals to perform confusing and physically grueling tricks. Countless videos, whistleblowers and eyewitness accounts confirm that beatings and other forms of corporal punishment are used to make animals submissive and coerce them into performing. During transport, these animals are often subjected to prolonged confinement and denied basic necessities, such as adequate exercise and access to clean cages, food, water and veterinary care.

These acts can also be a public safety risk. Rampaging elephants have bolted out of circuses. Big cats and primates have injured people. Since 1990, more than 300 dangerous incidents involving big cats have occurred in 44 states, including 10 people that have been killed and more than 200 – including scores of children – have been injured in the U.S.¹

This is the year to protect these animals from exploitation and cruel treatment. We applaud the committee for raising this bill and urge its passage.

HB 5577- AN ACT CONCERNING SURPLUS FOOD DONATION AND ESTABLISHING FOOD COMPOSTING REQUIREMENTS

Sierra Club Connecticut supports HB 5577. All Connecticut municipalities should be separating out food waste from their waste streams and into a composting program. Food waste continues to be around 20% of our annual waste stream.² This bill would put a significant dent in that number.

This bill also requires commercial food wholesalers or distributors, industrial food manufacturers or processors, supermarkets, resorts or conference centers to put forth a plan to donate excess food to food relief organizations. This helps both with diverting food from our waste stream and getting food to folks in need. It is a win/ win. We would, however, suggest guardrails to guarantee that said food is fit for consumption.

¹ <https://www.humanesociety.org/sites/default/files/docs/captive-big-cat-incidents.pdf>

² https://portal.ct.gov/-/media/DEEP/waste_management_and_disposal/Solid_Waste_Management_Plan/CMMSEnal2015MSWCharacterizationStudy.pdf



HB 6664- AN ACT MANAGING WASTE AND CREATING A WASTE AUTHORITY

Sierra Club Connecticut does not support HB 6664. There are sections of the bill that we do support, noted below. We are strongly supportive of good EPR for packaging legislation, and we would like to work with the committee to develop language that we can support. In its current form, we cannot support this bill. If implemented, several provisions in HB 6664 could possibly make the waste crisis and its inequities and environmental injustices worse.

In particular, Section 1 allows consumer brands and the packaging industry to set its own packaging recycling and diversion goals with limited oversight or enforcement from the state. The packaging industry has failed time and again to meet their own unenforceable goals and the packaging waste continues to increase.³ We recommend substitute language being added into the bill to ensure the goals are strong enough to make a real difference in packaging reduction and enforceable to ensure they are met.

Some other problematic language in Section 1 is in the definition of recycling. It does not exclude toxic, climate destroying plastic disposal techniques such as pyrolysis, gasification, chemical recycling or advanced recycling from its definition. This creates loopholes that the petrochemical industry has pushed for and will undoubtedly exploit.⁴ We suggest removing “Recycling for plastics includes a feedstock that is converted to a raw material that is used for the manufacture of new products” and replacing with “Recycling also does not include any chemical or molecular conversion process — including gasification, pyrolysis, solvolysis, depolymerization, thermal desorption, advanced recycling, chemical recycling, or molecular recycling — the resulting materials, feedstocks, or by-products of which are incinerated, combusted, or used as a fuel or for energy generation.”

Within section 2, there is a similar issue and potential loophole. We would like to see language added in to state that post-consumer recycled content cannot include feedstocks from advanced recycling, chemical recycling, etc.

Section 3 would authorize the Commissioner of DEEP to issue requests for proposals for new solid waste, including waste incinerators. Section 8 would increase solid waste disposal fees for trash burned at incinerators to \$3 a ton and create a fee of \$5 a ton for waste shipped out of state, in effect incentivizing burning waste. Incinerators are the most expensive and polluting way of waste disposal. It is NOT a renewable source of energy. It is dirtier than coal, releasing 28 times as much dioxin, 6 times as much lead and mercury, 3.2 times more NOx, 2.5 times more carbon dioxide, and twice as much carbon monoxide. They do not monitor what they are putting into the air on a day to day basis. It still gets landfilled in the form of toxic ash. Some harmful effects noted around incinerators are increases in preterm babies, increased cancers, increased dioxins in the blood of incinerator workers, increases in respiratory diseases and

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<https://www.greenpeace.org/usa/news/big-brands-fail-their-own-voluntary-commitment-to-eliminate-plastic-pollution/>

⁴ <https://just-zero.org/reports/loopholes-injustice-advanced-recycling-myth/>



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asthma attacks.⁵ Connecticut should not even be considering adding new incineration facilities into the state.

Sierra Club does support Sections 4-7 of the bill, which could reduce and divert Connecticut's organic waste. Organic waste diversion could potentially reduce our waste stream by 20%. EPR for packaging could reduce our packaging and plastic waste as well if implemented correctly.

We ask that the bill include mandatory enforceable packaging reduction requirements, state oversight, and exclude any loopholes or language that could allow for climate damaging, toxic and polluting technologies.

HJ 37- RESOLUTION PROPOSING AN AMENDMENT TO THE STATE CONSTITUTION TO PROVIDE FOR AN ENVIRONMENTAL RIGHTS AMENDMENT

Sierra Club Connecticut supports HJ 37. We strongly believe in every person's right to clean and healthy air, water, and soil, a stable climate and healthy ecosystems. These rights should be inherent to all people. State and local governments should be defenders of this right and stewards of our natural resources. These rights and responsibilities are on par with other rights guaranteed to all in this country, like freedom of speech and religion. This amendment would guarantee these rights under the Connecticut State Constitution.

Enshrining these rights as an amendment to the State constitution would ensure that the government is protecting communities from toxic pollution and prioritizing environmental justice equitably across the state. It would give them tools to limit projects that would cause environmental harm and harm to public health.

We urge passage of this amendment and give the people of the state the opportunity to declare their right to a safe, clean, healthy Connecticut for generations to come.

SB301- AN ACT REQUIRING THE PROVISION OF ALLTERRAIN WHEELCHAIRS AT STATE PARKS

Sierra Club Connecticut supports SB 301. We strongly believe in the right of outdoor access for all. This bill would significantly help those who enjoy the outdoors but have been limited to where they can go by mobility issues. Other states, such as Georgia, South Carolina, Minnesota, and Michigan are already providing access in this manner. The beauty of Connecticut should be able to be enjoyed by all residents of the state and Sierra Club Connecticut will support any and all legislation that will make this a reality.

Thank you for consideration of our testimony.

Sincerely,

Ann Gadwah, Advocacy and Outreach Organizer
Sierra Club Connecticut

⁵ <http://www.energyjustice.net/files/incineration/trashincineration.pdf>