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Empowering Communities, Advocating Solutions.

January 22, 2019

Stamford Board of Representatives
888 Washington Blvd, 4th Floor
PO Box 10152
Stamford, CT 06904-2152

RE: Proposal to Exempt Medicare/Medicaid Recipients from Stamford Single-Use Bag Fee

Dear Board of Representatives Members,

CCE is a non-partisan, non-profit organization that advocates for policies that protect public health and the environment in Connecticut and New York. **On behalf of our 830 contributing members in Stamford, CCE strongly opposes any change to the City's disposable bag policy to exempt Medicare and Medicaid recipients from the mandatory fee on single-use checkout bags.**

CCE supports a ban/fee hybrid approach towards promoting reusable bag use, as it is a proven-effective way to create a shift in consumer behavior. By eliminating single-use plastic bags and establishing a charge on paper and reusable bags, the City of Stamford has created a strong financial incentive, which will encourage members of the public to bring their own bags to the grocery or retail checkout counter. This is the intended behavior outcome of this policy *not to encourage members of the public pay for disposable bags.*

The charge on paper bags is central to an effective disposable bag law. The efficacy of such policies can be demonstrated through lessons learned in areas where disposable bag laws are already in effect and achieving positive consumer behavior outcomes:

- The City of San Jose, CA's ban on thin plastic bags and 10-cent charge on paper bags went into effect in January of 2012. Within the first few months of implementation, the ordinance resulted in an increase in the number of customers bringing their own bags from 4% to 62%, and a reduction in plastic bag pollution by 89%¹.
- Alameda County, CA's ban on thin plastic bags and a fee on paper and reusable bags went into effect in November of 2017, and has since led to an 80% decline in the use of single use paper and plastic bags².

¹ Memo to the Transportation and Environment Committee, City of San Jose, California, Bring Your Own Bag Ordinance Implementation Results and Actions to Reduce EPS Foam Food Ware, November 21, 2012, available at http://www3.sanjoseca.gov/clerk/CommitteeAgenda/TE/20121203/TE20121203_d5.pdf

² Alameda County Waste Management Authority Website, Reusable Bag Ordinance, for Shoppers, available at <http://reusablebagsac.org/shoppers/information>

Creating exemptions for large portions of the population is problematic, as it eliminates a critical component of the ban/fee policy. By exempting senior citizens on Medicare and Medicaid, the Board of Representatives would create a loophole through which a significant portion of City residents would be allowed to receive unlimited single-use paper bags (in addition to thicker, "reusable" plastic shopping bags) at no cost. This totally defeats the purpose of the ordinance and could result in unintended consequences in the form of increased paper bag consumption.

An exemption for Medicare and Medicaid recipients assumes that all senior citizens living within the city limits are experiencing financial hardships, which is inaccurate. In fact, the policy already contains an exemption for consumers who are receiving SNAP or WIC benefits, and any seniors who are currently using such benefits for retail transactions are already exempt. Additionally, the exemption on senior citizens would set a new precedent for Connecticut towns & municipalities, which may serve to weaken local efforts to reduce single-use bag consumption moving forward.

The fee component on paper bags is critical to creating the desired behavior change, and for ensuring that consumers do not simply transition from one single-use bag to another. The Board of Representatives (BoR) should not advance any changes exempting Medicare/Medicaid recipients, or any other large populations from the law unnecessarily. Instead, the BoR should move forward with implementation and enforcement of the ordinance, as written. The City of Stamford has established itself as a leader on eliminating pollution from disposable bags and should continue to move forward with the strongest ban/fee policy available.

Thanks in advance for the opportunity to comment on this important issue. Please do not hesitate to contact me at (475) 434-1606, or via email at lburch@citizenscampaign.org with any questions or concerns.

Respectfully Submitted,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Louis W. Burch".

Louis W. Burch
Connecticut Program Director