



HOUSE COMMERCE AND CONSUMER AFFAIRS

March 6, 2019

HB 558 – Restricting the Distribution of Plastic Straws

Testimony

Good morning, Mr. Chairman and members of the committee. My name is Paula Minnehan, Senior VP, State Government Relations with the New Hampshire Hospital Association (NHHA), representing all 26 of the state's community hospitals as well as all specialty hospitals.

The NHHA has concerns with HB 558. While we appreciate the sponsor's intent to address the use of single-use plastic straws, we have concerns with how this bill would impact hospitals in patient care areas, where straws are primarily used. This bill contains no exceptions for medical facilities. In other parts of country where these regulations have been passed, exceptions are allowed. We believe that medical facilities should be exempted from these types of regulations since patients need flexible drinking straws due to medical or physical conditions. Presently, no suitable flexible compostable paper straws are available for clinical applications. Paper straws have been shown to break down if left in liquids which is how they are most often utilized in patient settings. Medical facilities in other parts of the U.S. have yet to find workable alternatives for their patient care areas. Significant differences in costs are also a concern.

Hospitals in New Hampshire work hard to reduce the volume and toxicity of their waste. The New Hampshire Hospitals for a Healthy Environment (NH3E) was established in September 2001 in response to the ongoing interest expressed by New Hampshire's hospitals around issues such as recycling, waste minimization, environmentally preferable purchasing, mercury reduction, and other concerns related to environmental improvement and sustainability.

The group has met quarterly since 2001 and has closely collaborated with the NH Department of Environmental Services and EPA Region I to advance its efforts.

Working together, hospitals have explored and, in many cases, enhanced or implemented the following programs at their facilities:

- Recycling (including paper, plastics, cardboard, aluminum, batteries, glass, electronics, textiles, etc. It continues to concentrate on finding viable ways to recycle sterilization

wrap, a large percentage of hospital waste – U.S. hospitals produce more than 255 million pounds of blue wrap annually.)

- Pollution prevention
- Mercury reduction/elimination
- Medical (red bag) waste reduction
- Pharmaceutical waste management
- Greener cleaning
- Chemical minimization and proper disposal
- Food waste reduction and composting
- Climate Change preparedness and resiliency measures
- Energy conservation/efficiency

We do believe this issue deserves further research and study, so our recommendation is to incorporate this bill into HB 617, which creates a study committee to study recycling streams in New Hampshire. That bill passed the House earlier in February.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide our comments. I am happy to answer any questions.