



SENATE COMMERCE COMMITTEE

April 30, 2019

HB 558 – Restricting the Distribution of Plastic Straws

Testimony

Good afternoon, 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 is neutral on HB 558, as amended. We did have concerns with the bill, as introduced but the bill was amended in the House to address our concerns. We do appreciate the sponsor's intent to address the use of single-use plastic straws, but we did have concerns with how this bill, as introduced, would impact hospitals in patient care areas, where straws are primarily used. This bill before you contains an exception for medical facilities, and we ask, if this committee chooses to pass this bill, that the exception remain in the bill.

In other parts of country where these regulations have been passed, exceptions are allowed. We believe that health care 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. Health care 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.

We do believe this issue deserves further research and study, so another suggested 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 and was heard in the Senate Energy and Natural Resources committee last month.

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