



February 5, 2015

The Honorable Arthur Handy
Chair, House Committee on Environment and Natural Resources
State of Rhode Island General Assembly

Dear Chairman Handy:

On behalf of the American Forest & Paper Associationⁱ (AF&PA) and the Renewable Bag Councilⁱⁱ (RBC), we appreciate the opportunity to share our perspective on legislation under consideration by the Committee on House Bill 5151. AF&PA and the RBC are active on this issue in states and localities across the country. We believe that all paper bags are a commodity that is highly recycled, recyclable, compostable, and renewable. **We urge you to amend this bill to remove some of the requirements for qualification as a recycled paper bag.**

The bill defines a recycled paper bag by specifying that each bag contain 40 percent “post consumer” recycled content. The “post-consumer” qualifier is a distinction without a difference. It only serves to draw attention away from the important fact that materials from every step in the paper production process can, and are, being recycled and reused instead of being placed in a landfill.

The RBC and AF&PA are also concerned with the definition’s reference to “old growth” fiber as this term has no silvicultural or legal meaning. From a practical perspective, using older, high value trees as material to make bags would not be economically feasible. The other problem for our members is that there is no way to certify that our bags are compliant with an “old growth” prohibition given that there is no definition.

Consumers who are sensitive to environmental concerns choose paper bags. Responding to consumer demands, many retailers have already voluntarily transitioned to paper. Not only are paper bags made from recycled paper, they are highly recycled themselves and are a fixture in community recycling programs throughout the state and the rest of the country. In fact, Rhode Island residents frequently use paper bags as their containers when recycling other paper products such as newspapers, magazines, envelopes, juice and milk cartons, and printer paper—all items that are accepted at the curb in the state. According to the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, the paper bag boasts a national recycling rate of nearly 50 percent. We have exceeded 63 percent recovery for recycling for the past five years. In 2013 63.5 percent of the paper and paper-based packaging used in the U.S. was recovered for recycling – more than 50 million tons.

From a raw material perspective, paper bags are made from a renewable resource – managed forests – that provides habitats for animals and removes large amounts of carbon dioxide from the air we breathe. Today the U.S. has 20 percent more trees than it did on the first Earth Day celebration more than 40 years ago and one-third of the U.S. is forested - 751 million acres. Privately owned forests supply 91 percent of the wood harvested in the U.S. Despite the tremendous progress that has already been made, the paper industry has no intention of resting on its laurels. In March 2011 we announced a voluntary industry fiber

recovery goal to exceed 70 percent by 2020. This goal is part of the most extensive set of quantifiable sustainability goals set by a major U.S. manufacturing industry. *Better Practices, Better Planet 2020*—AF&PA's sustainability initiative—is a proactive commitment to the long-term success of our industry, our communities, our environment, and the nearly 900,000 men and women who make the paper and wood products vital to the lives of people around the world.

The six goals targeted within *Better Practices, Better Planet 2020* focus on increasing paper recovery for recycling, improving energy efficiency, reducing greenhouse gas emissions, promoting sustainable forestry practices, improving workplace safety, and reducing water use.

We thank the Committee for the recognition of the value of paper bags as an option for Rhode Island consumers and encourage the Committee to avoid measures that penalize paper. As always, we stand ready to assist you and offer our expertise as a resource as you begin to shape policy on this important issue.

For additional information, please contact Abigail Turner, Manager of State Government Affairs, AF&PA at (202) 463-2596 or abigail_turner@afandpa.org.

Sincerely,



Cathy Foley
Group Vice President

Cc:
Committee on Environment and Natural Resources

ⁱ The American Forest & Paper Association (AF&PA) serves to advance a sustainable U.S. pulp, paper, packaging, and wood products manufacturing industry through fact-based public policy and marketplace advocacy. AF&PA member companies make products essential for everyday life from renewable and recyclable resources and are committed to continuous improvement through the industry's sustainability initiative - [Better Practices, Better Planet 2020](#). The forest products industry accounts for nearly 4 percent of the total U.S. manufacturing GDP, manufactures approximately \$210 billion in products annually, and employs nearly 900,000 men and women. The industry meets a payroll of approximately \$50 billion annually and is among the top 10 manufacturing sector employers in 47 states. In Rhode Island, the industry employs nearly 1,000 individuals, with an annual payroll of over \$32 million. Visit AF&PA online at www.afandpa.org or follow us on Twitter [@ForestandPaper](https://twitter.com/ForestandPaper).

ⁱⁱ The Renewable Bag Council (RBC) is comprised of manufacturers and converters of renewable, recycled, recyclable, and compostable Kraft paper used for checkout bags at grocery and retail outlets throughout Washington and across the United States. The RBC is affiliated with the American Forest & Paper Association (AF&PA). Visit the RBC online at www.renewablebag.org or follow us on Twitter [@renewablebag](https://twitter.com/renewablebag).