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March 20, 2025

The Honorable David A. Bennett, Chair
House Committee on Environment and Natural Resources
State House
82 Smith St.
Providence, RI 02903

RE: H 5492 – An Act Health and Safety – Microplastics Reduction Act

Dear Chair Bennett:

Please accept this letter, with concerns, regarding H 5492, legislation that seeks to limit the introduction of microplastics into the environment, understand the sources of microplastics in the environment, and identify strategies to reduce/eliminate sources of microplastics.

H 5492 would prohibit a manufacturer from selling, offering for sale, or distributing into commerce any product containing synthetic polymer micro particles, beginning January 1, 2029. The health impacts of microplastics are not well understood at this point. Peer-reviewed scientific publications indicate that microplastic exposure can cause health effects, but there are no health-based standards for microplastic exposure. Additionally, H 5492 would call for the adoption of microplastics testing plan of water, soil, and other environmental media for the presence of microplastics, and would adopt a statewide microplastics strategy plan. The bill focuses on quantifying the release of microplastics into the environment.

To implement the responsibilities outlined in H 5492 that are assigned to RIDOH, RIDOH would need significant additional financial resources which have not been identified in the bill. Additional FTEs as well as new equipment would be needed, and there are no current federally standardized testing methods for microplastics. RIDOH would need to be included for the development of test methods (unless they are outsourced, which would also require funding) and sampling strategy. It looks like the plan would need to be developed within three years and would need to include environmental baseline measurements of microplastics, but also some level of source tracking to guide policy and statutory changes.

RIDOH also has concerns about the “assessment of the environmental and health impacts associated with microplastic contamination” included in the proposed legislation. Such an assessment would be extremely difficult to conduct and unlikely to definitively tie any specific health outcomes to microplastics. This would likely require testing of biomarkers in people/animals to assess the health impacts. These are currently poorly defined and linking them specifically to the presence of microplastics will likely be impossible due to co-occurrence of other environmental and socioeconomic factors. It is also important to specify dimensions in either the “microplastics” or the “particle” definition. Clarity on what “other environmental media” are and whether fish/shellfish would be considered is also important.

As currently written, RIDOH is unable to support this legislation. I thank you for the opportunity to comment on the proposed legislation.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Jerome M. Larkin" with a stylized flourish at the end.

Jerome M. Larkin, MD
Director

CC: The Honorable Jennifer Boylan
The Honorable Members of the House Committee on Environment and Natural
Resources
Nicole McCarty, Esquire, Chief Legal Counsel
Lynne Urbani, Director of House Policy