

**Testimony by Tim Phelan,**  
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(formerly the Connecticut Retail Merchants Association)



**Committee on Environment**  
**March 8, 2024**

Co-Chairs Senator Lopes and Representative Gresko, Ranking Members Senator Harding and Representative Callahan, and Vice Chairs Senators Hochadel and Representative Palm, and members of the Environment Committee, I am Tim Phelan, President of the Connecticut Retail Network.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify on Senate Bill 291, An Act Concerning the Sale of Certain Balloons. This proposed legislation aims to prohibit the sale of helium and lighter-than-air gas balloons that are not biodegradable.

As you know, the Connecticut Retail Network represents retail businesses, both small and large, across the state. There are roughly 42,000 retail establishments in Connecticut, and in total, the retail industry produces approximately 14% of Connecticut's total GDP.

Retail businesses are an indispensable segment of the Connecticut economy, supporting more than 470,000 jobs and contributing more than \$34 billion to our state's economy. 24% of jobs in Connecticut – nearly one in four – are supported by the retail industry. And more than 98% of all retail companies are small businesses, employing fewer than 50 people.

Senate Bill 291 is a bill whose time has not yet arrived. It would require, on or after October 1, 2027, that no person shall sell, offer for sale, import or distribute in this state any helium or lighter-than-air gas balloon that is not biodegradable.

Although the bill is certainly well intentioned, and its concern for animals and other wildlife is certainly laudable, what is unknown and uncertain is whether technology will move at the rate the proponents hope for. And if it does not – it would be harming business that want to respond to consumer demand for balloons that are used in a full range of celebrations throughout our state, from birthday parties to weddings to any number of special occasions. And harming retailers, who take pride in responding to their customers.

According to a nationwide online survey of 1,500 U.S. consumers conducted by an independent market research firm for the celebration industry, 65% of Americans hold a positive view towards balloons and 71% of Americans say they are likely to purchase balloons in the next 12 months. The survey found that 3 in 4 Americans do NOT favor limits on the sale or use of balloons.

It is also worth noting that according to data from the International Coastal Cleanup® (ICC), balloons account for less than 1% of all debris found during beach cleanups in the U.S. since 2015.

Loving balloons and the environment are not mutually exclusive, and there are steps that the celebration industry is taking that underscore their efforts to promote sustainability without incurring the economic harm that a ban, or requirements such as this bill contemplates, would incur.

These efforts include incorporating a weight requirement attached to all balloons filled with lighter than gas air at retail establishments, or prohibiting the intentional release of balloons into the atmosphere.

Retailers will continue to work with the balloon celebration industry to take responsible actions in keeping with the preferences and best interests of consumers and the environment.

Right now, this is a bill whose time has not yet arrived. And for that reason, the retail industry in Connecticut does not support the legislation at the present time.

Thank you.