I am Martin Mador. I speak for myself on this bill, which I asked the chairs to raise. I am the Sierra Club Legislative and Political Chair. I served on the Hamden Natural Resources and Open Space (Conservation) Commission for seven years, and have served on the Hamden Energy Use and Climate Change (EUCC) Commission for nine years, currently as its Chair. I have served as the environmental advisor to a former Hamden mayor. I have been the special projects consultant to the CT Association of Conservation and Inland Wetlands Commissions, where I published a book about Conservation Commissions. I have been a founder, officer, and board member of numerous non-profit organizations.

My grateful thanks to the Committee for raising this bill. Perhaps simplistic on its face, it holds the potential to increase citizen participation on advisory town boards and commissions. This bill explicitly excludes commissions with regulatory powers.

Dating back perhaps to 1959, if not earlier, we have had political quotas for municipal boards, commissions, legislative bodies, and committees. Statute (9-167a) refers to this as “minority representation”. This applies to all town bodies with regulatory or legislative authority, as well as those with only advisory powers. For example, Conservation Commissions, authorized by state statute (7-131a) are strictly advisory, but appointments are nonetheless governed by 9-167a.

Following state law, when we populate our town commissions, we look for diversity of members, but we only consider party affiliation. Perhaps, maybe, possibly, there is some merit to this for commissions with regulatory authority. However, we should let nothing impede our efforts to appropriately fill advisory commissions, such Conservation and Energy, with interested and knowledgeable town residents.

Imagine ensuring diversity on these commissions. We might take into account:
- age
- gender
- race/ethnicity
- education
- residence location in town
- residence type
- length of residence in town
- children
Or perhaps even
- emotional maturity
- ability to communicate effectively

And, perhaps, most significantly,
- strength of connection with reality

Or perhaps we should just try to find people interested and vested in the commission’s mission and work, and make sure we can find someone to fill every vacant position. Political affiliation just doesn’t seem that relevant when considering how to maximize town open space, or ensure the town has maximal access to clean energy and understands the returns on promoting energy efficiency.

Towns which are heavily democratic or republican could have trouble finding enough people with these party quotas in place. Hamden has that problem with our Energy Use and Climate Change Commission. The town has 4 times as many active registered Democrats as Republicans. We currently have vacancies, though none available to democrats because of the quota. We’ve reached out to the community looking for members, including an address to the town Republican Town Committee, but still come up short.

Do I know how many other towns share this challenge? Conducting a comprehensive study of the impact on 169 towns would take significant effort. I’m sure OPM would file a bill-killing fiscal note if so ordered. Would the National Conference of State Legislatures agree do a national study for us? But why be concerned with the exact scope of the impact? We know there is a problem needing a solution.

This change is helpful and benign on its face. It costs nothing to implement. It has no impact on the state budget deficit. It favors no one with some specific advocacy position.

HB 5554 solves this problem by simply removing the political affiliation quotas requirement, but only for advisory boards and commissions. It is silent on rules for appointing members to legislative bodies and regulatory boards such as Planning and Zoning and Inland Wetlands.

How do we know that a commission is advisory? Look at its creation documents. From the Hamden Ordinances §33.163 Limitations of the Commission (2005):
(A) Nothing in this ordinance shall be construed as conferring on the Commission any administrative authority over the staff or the operations of any Town Department(s) or any portion of Town government.
(B) The Commission's authority is limited to advice and recommendations to the Mayor and the Legislative Council
(C) The Commission shall have no authority to incur any expenses without the approval of the Mayor and the Legislative Council. The Commission shall have no fiscal authority.

If we impose rules on how we govern, we need to make sure they are appropriate, helpful, justified. Yes, we are the Land of Steady Habits, but just because we have done something the same way for the past 58 years, there is no reason not to stop to consider whether that has served us well, and should perhaps be re-considered. So please support HB 5554.