

FOR THE ENVIRONMENT COMMITTEE PUBLIC HEARING TESTIMONY OF BARRETT S. ROBBINS-PIANKA

March 8, 2018

RE: R. B. 5354

AN ACT CONCERNING SNAPPING TURTLES AND RED-EARED SLIDER TURTLES.

I am a resident of the Maromas area of Middletown with an interest in wildlife, particularly reptiles and amphibians. I strongly support the purpose of R. B. 5354: "To prohibit the sale or trade of snapping turtles and red-eared slider turtles." R. B. 5354 returns authority to DEEP commissioner over snapping turtles, which was carved out in 1971, and extends this authority to red-eared slider turtles, a species new to Connecticut. The majority of my testimony concerns sub-section (a), the part of R. B. 5354 which extends prohibitions concerning the sale or exchange of certain wild animals to snapping turtles and red-eared slider turtles. Subsections (b) and (c) specify additional regulations that may be adopted by the commissioner.

To: Environment Committee Chairmen Senator Ted Kennedy, Jr., Senator Craig Miner and Representative Demico; and Honorable Members of the Environment Committee,

R. B. 5354 addresses the status of snapping turtles and red-eared slider turtles under state law. The existing law needs updating to reflect modern conservation biology. R.B. 5354 removes language that excludes snapping turtles from protection from commercial exploitation. The language to be changed was added more than 45 years ago. It is a regulatory carve out, a throwback to the early days of ecological science, before the importance of snapping turtles in maintaining the ecosystem was known. It will protect snapping turtles and red-eared slider turtles from commercial traffic. Today, Connecticut's conservation biologists understand the important role snappers play in maintaining biodiversity and the health of the ecosystem. DEEP Wildlife has continued to improve protections for Connecticut's resident turtles and with R. B. 5354 extends protection to non-native red-eared slider turtles.

R. B. 5354 will end unsustainable and institutionalized wildlife trafficking in Connecticut and help end the approval of the sale of the State's snapping turtles to satisfy the demand from Asian markets. In 2011, Rick Jacobson, DEEP Wildlife Division Director, reported that since the year 2000, 12 to 20 **million** turtles per year have been shipped from the United States. This ravenous worldwide demand affects Connecticut's snapping turtles. In 2012, at a DEEP public hearing, a commercial turtle trapper testified that he had taken 10,000 pounds of snapping turtle in six weeks from the freshwater tidal marshes of

the Connecticut River, referring specifically to Deep River's Pratt Cove. The provision of R.B. 5354 to protect Connecticut's snapping turtles from commercial exploitation is long overdue.

As section (a) of R. B. 5354 re establishes and recognizes the commissioner's authority to regulate these turtles, I found the references to possible regulations concerning reporting and collection of fees in subsections (b) and (c), difficult to understand, superfluous and redundant. The possible establishment of fees for prohibited sales and trade of turtles is unnecessary and confusing. The simple purpose of R. B. 5354, to return authority to the commissioner to prohibit sales and trade of all CT wildlife, becomes complicated, obscure and open to misinterpretation. Codifying fees by statute may have the unintended consequence of perpetuating the trade in wildlife.

In addition to recognizing the need to update an antiquated law, R.B. 5354 is an act of humanity. I am very thankful to and proud of the Environment Committee for taking note of these ancient reptile species. By removing Connecticut's snapping turtles and red-eared sliders from wildlife trafficking, you have reduced cruelty in the world and protected our environment. Thank you for Raising Bill 5354 for Public Hearing.

I appreciate the opportunity to testify and look forward to a bright future under law for Connecticut's turtles.

Sincerely,

Barrett S. Robbins-Pianka, Resident

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