



**FOR THE PUBLIC HEALTH COMMITTEE  
PUBLIC HEARING TESTIMONY OF RIVERS ALLIANCE OF CONNECTICUT  
March 20, 2018**

**RE: BILL 5154 AAC WATER USAGE AND CONSERVATION  
DURING DROUGHT CONDITIONS. (Support with recommendations.)**

To the Chairmen: Sen. Terry Gerratana,  
Sen. Heather Somers, and Rep. Jonathan Steinberg,  
And Honorable Members of the Committee:

*Rivers Alliance of Connecticut is a statewide non-profit organization, founded in 1992, as a coalition of river organizations, other conservation non-profits, individuals, and businesses working to protect and enhance Connecticut's rivers, streams, aquifers, lakes, and estuaries. We promote sound water policies and water stewardship through education and assistance at the local, regional, and state levels.*

Thank you for the opportunity to remark on this bill.

Rivers Alliance of Connecticut supports the Raised Bill 5154, An Act Concerning Water Usage and Conservation during Drought Conditions, but with recommendations.

As many of you and your colleagues know, Connecticut needs to update its policy for responding to droughts. The proposed legislation is in large part based on work done by legislators in recent sessions. It expertly identifies the main issues involved in effective drought management. It properly assigns responsibility for change to the Water Planning Council. But this bill requires only a review of current policy and a report, with some recommendations for improvements—to be submitted three years hence.

Drought policy has been studied for over 15 years and a draft State Drought Plan was submitted to the Water Planning Council more than a year ago. The Water Planning Council has indicated that it is recasting this draft, working with the ad hoc Interagency Drought Work Group. However, given the state's recent experience of what are sometimes called "flash droughts," we urge that legislative action be accelerated.

We need both action and a report.

The Interagency Drought Work Group (made up of representatives from Dept of Public Health, Office of Policy & Management, Dept of Energy & Environmental Protection, CT Dept of Agriculture, CT Dept of Emergency Services and Public Protection) has been informally the group that advises the agencies and governor on drought policy and management. It is currently reviewing the draft State Drought Plan, prepared by a subgroup of the Water Planning Council

Advisory Group and referred to the Interagency Drought Work Group by the Water Planning Council. It also has the benefit of many deliberations and written suggestions on drought management before and after the plan that passed in 2003.

Rivers Alliance proposes three courses of action to improve Connecticut's drought policy:

- 1) that the Interagency Drought Work Group be codified for membership and function as soon as possible, and at the latest within one year. This group should serve as the official advisor on conditions and responses related to drought. In consultation with this group, the governor can declare drought emergency or high risk water stress, either statewide or regionally.
- 2) that state law be amended to enable state authorities to declare a drought emergency (or other stage of drought) for a region or watershed rather than only for the entire state.
- 3) that within the year, the Interagency Drought Work Group and Water Planning Council propose uniform rules for defining and declaring a drought area or high risk water stress area -- and a means of publicizing and enforcing comprehensive water conservation measures during the drought. These rules should rationalize and coordinate the haphazard and limited conservation authorities of different utilities and multiple towns.

The drought of 2015 and 2016 was a recent reminder of shortcomings in current state drought policy—the regional nature of water shortages and the lack of effective mechanisms to enforce conservation measures once a drought is declared.

Action needs to be taken before Connecticut's next drought.

Thank you for your consideration. We most certainly stand ready to answer questions or assist in revising the bill if that is desired.

Margaret Miner, Executive Director  
Martha Smith, Policy Director  
Rivers Alliance of Connecticut, Litchfield  
[rivers@riversalliance.org](mailto:rivers@riversalliance.org) 860-361-9349