For the Planning and Development Committee
Testimony of Alicea Charamut, Executive Director
March 10, 2020

Rivers Alliance was formed to fight for sound water policies at the state and federal levels, to provide education on water resources, and to advocate for any person or group striving to protect water. If you want clean, free-flowing and healthy rivers, and high-quality drinking water, Rivers Alliance is here to help.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony on the following raised bills before you today.

SB 423 AAC CERTAIN SEWAGE DISPOSAL SYSTEMS AND ALTERNATIVE TREATMENT SYSTEMS, Oppose

In his testimony on SB 1013 which is the exact same bill before you today, then DPH Commissioner Raul Pino stated that, “The law provides for the transfer of jurisdiction from DEEP to DPH for alternative on-site sewage treatment systems with capacities up to 5,000 GPD, once DPH promulgates regulations that govern such systems. Unfortunately, no funding was ever appropriated to facilitate DPH’s efforts to adopt regulations and operate an administrative program for these alternative systems.” DPH still has yet to develop these regulations and, therefore, is not prepared to implement oversight. Raising the threshold for jurisdiction at this time does not make sense.

Furthermore, all wastewater treatment systems require some level of maintenance and oversight to ensure that ground and surface waters are not impaired by malfunction or neglect of proper maintenance. With proper oversight and regulation, alternative sewage treatment systems (ATS) could be a good solution in areas where traditional septic has or could cause impairment to our waters. But Connecticut is not there yet. DEEP and DPH need to come together to determine a pathway forward for ATS to be considered a viable tool that can be implemented in our communities.

Please reject this bill. Again.

SB 424 AAC THE BOLTON LAKES REGIONAL WATER POLLUTION CONTROL AUTHORITY, Oppose
This bill proposes to disregard every statute, regulation, ordinance, agreement, and plan that the state of Connecticut has in place that would require any inquiry into the potential environmental impacts, planning implications, and economic considerations of a specific sewer expansion proposal.

Following a September 2019 letter from the Connecticut Council on Environmental Quality raising substantive concerns about the project, DEEP issued a letter to the Office of Policy and Management that, “the Department will not proceed any further with the processing of the above-mentioned [sic] funding agreement modification or sanitary service area modification.” Their reasons being:

“State-funded projects which are intended to provide for or allow for increased economic development, are not projects that typically fall within the mission of the Department, yet often we are charged with administering funding or acting as the sponsoring agency for those projects solely because sanitary sewers are included in the proposed project. This puts us in the difficult and conflicting role of being the sponsoring agency of a project that is not in line with our mission, but for which we are required to produce the documentation required under CEPA, when in fact we should be providing comments on a proposed action, as the regulatory agency.”

DEEP then offers, “to work with OPM, CEQ, and the Department of Economic and Community Development to develop an effective process and tools to appropriately scrutinize sanitary sewer extension projects that have the primary objective of promoting economic development.”

To be sure, this is a situation without a clear immediate pathway forward. However, bypassing any and all public process and environmental review is not the solution. This is very dangerous precedent. Please do not pass this bill.