



**For the Environment Committee
Testimony of Alicea Charamut, Executive Director
March 3, 2021**

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 bill before you today.

SB 927 AAC REVISIONS TO THE SEWAGE SPILL RIGHT-TO-KNOW STATUTE – SUPPORT

An estimated 2 million gallons of sewage spilled into a section of the Mill River on July 6th. This section of the Mill River is bordered by public open space where the river flows through New Haven. Contractors already had equipment on site for a planned replacement, unfortunately, the pipe failed before work was set to begin. Locals continued to utilize the park, unaware of the potential public health hazard. Folks fished and let their dogs play in and drink the water. Families paddled around the area where the Mill Rivers meets the Q River.

The Greater New Haven Water Pollution Control Authority (GNHWPCA) did meet their reporting requirements according to state law and their own emergency response plan. However, that response plan was not robust enough to ensure that downstream communities were notified in a timely manner nor were there signs posted in the public park immediately downstream of the spill. To the WPCA's credit, they acknowledged this and have publicly committed to improving and enhancing their plan.

You may remember a 5 million gallon sewage spill on the Naugatuck River several years ago. While that situation was different in many ways from the spill in the Mill River, in that instance as well as this one, many river users were not aware of the spill and continued to fish and paddle.

Notice of sewage spills must be more effective. We should not have to wait for a sewage spill in each of our communities for those responsible to update plans and coordination so that each player knows their role.

Rivers Alliance has been part of a stakeholder group working with DEEP to create a more comprehensive sewage-right-to know notification system and process. Here are basic elements that are essential:

- **Electronic public notification** - DEEP is currently working with contractors to redesign the public facing sewage right-to-know website to make it more user-friendly to the public. Though they were unable to include in the contract a dedicated electronic notification system discussions are ongoing about using available existing systems such as Twitter or other existing state notification vehicle. As part of this effort any updates to an ongoing spill should be updated to the website when changes occur and the public notified.
- **All spills that reach surface waters shall be reported** - In the previous 2018 revision, a limit of 5000 gallons was placed on the public reporting requirement of a spill. Unfortunately, if an operator underestimates the size of a spill that is reaching a waterbody and doesn't report it properly then there is an unintentional violation. Removing the 5000 gallon baseline for reporting removes this problem and also reflects the reality that even a hundred gallon raw sewage spill into a small stream at low flows can be a public risk. How many of us grew up playing in small local creeks?
- **Signs must be posted along the affected water body notifying the public that the waters are unsafe** - As additional notification a section has been added on requiring health warning signs in areas the public is likely to interact with a waterbody that is experiencing a spill.

Some revisions were made to the proposed language after the raised bill deadline by the stakeholder group and DEEP. We are close to consensus on the final language which will not substantially change the main points stated above, but clarifies the language and reflects compromise on a few points especially the annual reporting requirement. This is once again due to limited staff resources. We look forward to working with your committee on the consideration of consensus language.