



**For the Environment Committee
Testimony of Alicea Charamut, Executive Director
February 15, 2023**

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.

HB 5608 AAC CERTAIN SOLAR PHOTOVOLTAIC FACILITIES LOCATED ON PRIME FARMLAND, FARMLAND OF STATE-WIDE IMPORTANCE OR CORE-FOREST LANDS - SUPPORT

This bill would require an applicant for environmental compatibility and public need for certain solar photovoltaic facilities to furnish a bond to cover all costs associated with decommissioning of the facility. We are in full support of this provision as it will ensure that the financial burden of decommission does not fall on taxpayers and our communities.

There are other provisions that we hope the committee will consider that will better protect our natural resources and drinking water while meeting must-needed clean-energy goals.

Rivers Alliance fully supports the use and expansion of solar to meet our carbon reduction goals. Unfortunately, our current framework and decision-making process for siting of large-scale solar undermines efforts to protect and enhance the natural resources that are a cheap and effective way to protect our communities from the impacts of climate change. Forests provide essential ecosystem services for maintaining water quality, water quantity, flood mitigation and drought resilience. Erosion as well as water and soil quality degradation continues to be a concern with large-scale facilities.

We concur with the concerns and support the language put forward by Denise Savageau of the Connecticut Association of Conservation Districts in her testimony.

We also concur with the Connecticut Water Works Association (CWWA) that lawmakers should consider incorporating non-water company owned watershed and Aquifer Protection Area lands in the scope of the bill.

The Watershed Lands Work Group of the Water Planning Council Advisory Group developed a report on Siting of Renewable-Energy Projects on Source-Water Land with a primary focus on solar facilities. The goal was to ensure protection of high-quality drinking water through protection of natural land on the watershed and make recommendations for better protection.

This report was developed after months of discussion with a broad stakeholder group and resulted in several consensus recommendations. Two of these consensus recommendations are:

- At BOTH the project selection and siting council application stages, the applicant should be required to indicate if the project is located on drinking water watershed source protection or aquifer protection land. This would not be burden on the applicant with the development of the [Public Water Supply map](#) on DPH's website.
- Consider adding DPH review along with DEEP and DoAg to PA17-218 for CSC renewable energy project petitions within public water supply watersheds and Aquifer Protection Areas, applying the Class I and II permitting standard of no significant impact to the purity and adequacy of the public water supply.

We would be happy to work with the committee and CWWA on a proposal that would implement these recommendations.