

Transportation Committee JOINT FAVORABLE REPORT

Bill No.: HB-5484

AN ACT CONCERNING TREE AND VEGETATION MANAGEMENT

Title: GUIDELINES BY THE DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION.

Vote Date: 3/20/2024

Vote Action: Joint Favorable

PH Date: 3/13/2024

File No.:

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SPONSORS OF BILL:

Transportation Committee

CO-SPONSORS

Sen. Hwang, 28th District

Rep. Reyes, 75th District

REASONS FOR BILL:

To take better considerations toward the environmental impacts of tree removals performed by the Department of Transportation, this bill seeks to create guidelines which acknowledge the environmental and health impacts of tree removals. The hope is by adopting these guidelines, the vegetational health of communities affected by these environmental factors will be improved and see changes.

RESPONSE FROM ADMINISTRATION/AGENCY:

Garrett Eucalitto, Commissioner, Department of Transportation

Commissioner Eucalitto submitted testimony in opposition to this legislation. In his testimony, the commissioner argues that adopting this legislation will lead to delays in construction projects throughout the state. He argues that these delays can hinder the department's ability to meet timelines, which will lead to an increase in costs, and exacerbate transportation issues for the public and surrounding communities. He also notes that the Department is committed to safe infrastructure for all users and delays in addressing trees may lead to injuries or deaths of motorists and expose the state to unnecessary and expensive claims. He also notes that subsection (e) is null and void, as all tree removals performed by the Department are for public safety. Commissioner Eucalitto also notes that adopting this

legislation would create delays and limit the Department's ability to perform routine vegetation removal like mowing.

NATURE AND SOURCES OF SUPPORT:

Juliet Cain, Member, Darien Pollinator Pathway

Mrs. Cain submitted testimony critiquing this legislation but supporting its goal. In her testimony, she argues that this bill is identical to a

law that was passed last session in the General Assembly, HB 6744. She notes that both bills are vague and do not go far enough. She argues that the Department of Transportation should prioritize safe transportation and public health concerns of communities that may be affected by their work. She notes that the committee should consider compensatory reforestation efforts.

Chris Donnelly

Mr. Donnelly submitted testimony critiquing this legislation but supporting its goal. In his testimony, he argues that this bill does not go far enough to address the issue of climate change. He argues that the Department of Transportation should be a leader in the fight against climate change.

Laurie Heiss, Co-Founder, Redding Tree Conservancy

Mrs. Heiss submitted testimony in support of this legislation. In her testimony, Mrs. Heiss argues that the Department of Transportation's tree removals can have certain inverse effects, which the department overlooks. She notes increases in heat and wind, flooding, and erosion as potential consequences. Mrs. Heiss also notes that the Department of Transportation prioritizes the safety and wellbeing of the traveling public, while disregarding the public health consequences their actions have on surrounding communities.

Diane Hoffman

Mrs. Hoffman submitted testimony in support of this legislation. In her testimony, Mrs. Hoffman argues that the Department of Transportation should adjust their guidelines to redefine the public in "public safety. She argues that the public should not be limited to only the traveling public but surrounding communities as well. She notes that unnecessary tree removal can lead to lower property values, increase noise, and air pollution, and negatively impact the quality of life. She also noted that dead, diseased, and hazardous trees should be removed, but non-hazardous trees should not.

Dr. Shirley McCarthy

Dr. McCarthy submitted testimony in support of this legislation. In her testimony, Dr. McCarthy provided statistics which support her argument that roadside trees can improve safety for drivers. Dr. McCarthy also notes that tree removals can increase mortality rates of drivers. She also argues that guidelines are created predominantly by statistics that only consider rural roads.

NATURE AND SOURCES OF OPPOSITION:

Charles Baugh

Mr. Baugh submitted testimony in opposition to this legislation. In his testimony, Mr. Baugh argues that the Department of Energy and Environmental Protection should not have the power to enact environmental standards and regulations. He argues that those decisions should be left to elected lawmakers and their voters, respectively. He notes that the state should address other priorities plaguing the state before enacting legislation to create environmental regulations.

Jean Lecours

Jean Lecours submitted testimony in strong opposition to this legislation.

Reported by: Tyler Fisher

Date: 4/3/24