



**For the Environment Committee  
Testimony of Alicea Charamut, Executive Director  
March 3, 2025**

*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.

**HB 5004 – AN ACT CONCERNING THE PROTECTION OF THE ENVIRONMENT AND THE DEVELOPMENT OF RENEWABLE ENERGY SOURCES AND ASSOCIATED JOB SECTORS– Supports with the exception of Section 24**

This bill proposes necessary and comprehensive approach to addressing the intensifying impacts of climate change. The actions contained in this bill on reducing greenhouse gas emissions, promoting renewable energy and energy efficiency, enhancing climate resilience, encouraging sustainable businesses and workforce development, and integrating nature-based solutions across Connecticut are urgently needed.

Several sections of this bill also implement recommendations in the GC3 Phase I Report and some of those proposed by the GC3 Working Groups.

Rivers Alliance supports most aspects of this bill (with the exception of Section 24) and offers the following perspectives on sections most relevant to our work.

**Section 17**

Rivers Alliance strongly supports a focus on nature based solutions as they are the least expensive and most effective tools in our toolbox to face the extreme weather events we’re witnessing.

Effective integration and prioritization of nature-based solutions to restore, maintain, or enhance ecosystem services are essential in adapting to and mitigating the impacts of the “feast and famine” cycle we are currently witnessing with more frequent, high intensity precipitation and more frequent droughts.

The conservation, restoration, and management of natural ecosystems are also essential for Connecticut to maintain and enhance carbon storage systems that actively pull carbon dioxide from the atmosphere and store it within plants and soils.

Nature-based solutions offer substantial benefits to local communities and biodiversity, including:

- Clean, abundant drinking water from forested watersheds.
- Increased productivity from healthy soils and pollinator habitats.
- Flood control and drought resilience from riparian buffers and functioning wetlands.
- Temperature moderation and high-quality habitats in healthy forests.

**This section should be strengthened with addition of the following sentence at the beginning of this section: “The Commissioner of Energy and Environmental Protection shall prioritize the use of nature-based solutions to support climate change mitigation and adaptation and increase biodiversity.”**

#### Section 18

Siting of solar has been a very important issue for Rivers Alliance because large-scale can be particularly damaging to our inland waters if not sited properly. Our mantra has always been - rooftops, brownfields and canopies first! We very much appreciate this section as it will help to promote solar canopies going forward.

#### Section 24

**Rivers Alliance strongly opposes this section.** It proposes changes to the Open Space & Watershed Land Acquisition Grant Program (OSWA) that add use of funds that were not intended for this program and will oversubscribe funds needed to protect open space as well as urban communities. There are other funding sources that are more appropriate for these programs and I refer to testimony of many others that offer suggestions for more appropriate funding sources.

Preserving and conserving open space and natural lands an extremely cost-effective and efficient way to protect water quality. Undeveloped lands in their natural state also help to mitigate flooding and increase water storage. OSWA provides matching grants to municipalities, land trusts, and water companies for open space, watershed land conservation, and access to passive public recreation. The Urban Green and Community Garden Grant Program (UGCG), a part of OSWA, provides financial assistance to municipalities and nonprofits to help transform urban properties into community gardens and green spaces in targeted investment, distressed, and environmental justice communities. Both programs are essential to land conservation, farmland preservation, and urban environments in communities across the state.

**We strongly urge the committee to strike this section from the bill.**