



**For the Housing Committee
Testimony of Alicea Charamut, Executive Director
February 13, 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 5002 - AN ACT CONCERNING HOUSING AND THE NEEDS OF HOMELESS PERSONS - **SUPPORT**

SB 12 - AN ACT CONCERNING CONNECTICUT'S HOUSING NEEDS - **SUPPORT**

There is no doubt that we urgently need to address the housing crisis and make housing more affordable—this is an urgent matter that must be resolved sooner rather than later. While I am not an expert in housing policy, I have sought to educate myself on the factors contributing to this crisis. My expertise lies in environmental policy—specifically, ensuring that we have water for both fish and faucets for future generations.

Your committee and the legislative body as a whole face an incredible challenge, and Rivers Alliance fully supports addressing the needs of our most vulnerable residents and ensuring housing needs are met for all. As you work toward these goals, I urge you to recognize that protecting our water resources and environment is not separate from this mission—it is fundamental to safeguarding our most vulnerable populations and strengthening our communities.

Land-use changes can have a significant impact on water quality and quantity. These impacts extend far beyond the immediate area of development, affecting downstream and downslope communities as well. That is why our laws and regulations protecting wetlands and water resources are so vital, especially as we face more frequent and extreme weather events.

These environmental protections are not arbitrary. They were designed to safeguard resources that every single one of us depends on—resources that cannot easily be replaced. When it comes to water, fixing pollution and flooding issues that we create comes at an extraordinarily high cost, both financially and environmentally.

I encourage everyone to explore Connecticut’s Environmental Justice Mapping Tool. It clearly illustrates how communities with the highest pollution burdens, most vulnerable populations, and highest flood risks are often located where our rivers come together—areas that collect stormwater runoff and pollution from upstream communities. Weakening protections for our waters and wetlands will worsen these vulnerabilities, compounding risks for the very communities that can least afford them.

As we deliberate on how to expand affordable housing, it is critical that we reject any approach that involves weakening the laws meant to protect our waters and wetlands. These protections are not barriers to progress—they are essential safeguards that protect public health, vulnerable populations, and the very ecosystems that sustain us.

To better understand housing solutions, I attended the Connecticut Section of the American Planning Association’s Housing Forum last year. At the forum, the American Planning Association presented its *Housing Supply Accelerator Playbook*, a resource developed collaboratively with diverse stakeholders, including developers. The Playbook offers numerous strategies for accelerating housing development. NOT ONE of these strategies suggests undermining environmental regulations as a means to address housing shortages.

Instead, the Playbook emphasizes reforms to exclusionary zoning practices that discourage housing diversity and affordability. It even identifies the need to incorporate climate hazard mitigation into housing planning—principles that align with protecting wetlands and water resources. Weakening these protections does the opposite. It creates new climate hazards, increases flood risks, and encourages development in areas that are undesirable and unsafe, particularly for our most vulnerable populations.

Connecticut’s housing crisis demands thoughtful, sustainable solutions. As you develop the language for this incredibly important bill, I encourage you to remember that sacrificing environmental protections in the name of housing is a false choice. Instead, we must pursue strategies that create resilient, inclusive communities while safeguarding our natural resources for future generations.

Thank you for your time and for considering this perspective as you work toward solutions that balance housing affordability with environmental stewardship. Rivers Alliance stands ready to assist the committee as you face this daunting task.