



**For the Environment Committee
Testimony of Alicea Charamut, Executive Director
March 13, 2026**

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 5520 AN ACT CONCERNING FISH PASSAGES – SUPPORTS

Connecticut's rivers historically supported abundant runs of migratory fish such as river herring, American shad, striped bass, and American eel. These species play a vital ecological role in river systems, transporting marine-derived nutrients upstream and supporting a wide range of wildlife. They also represent an important cultural and recreational resource for communities across the state.

However, the widespread construction of dams has severely fragmented Connecticut's river systems. While significant progress has been made through dam removal, fish ladder construction, and coordinated fisheries management efforts, barriers remain that continue to limit access to critical upstream habitat.

HB 5520 addresses an important gap in existing law by establishing a clear state process for ensuring **safe, timely, and effective fish passage at hydropower facilities that are not regulated by the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission (FERC)**. As noted by our partners at Farmington River Watershed Association and Save the Sound, only a small number of hydropower facilities fall into this category, but their impacts can be disproportionately large because they block access to extensive upstream river networks. In some cases, these barriers restrict migratory fish from reaching hundreds of miles of potential habitat.

Ensuring effective fish passage at these remaining barriers is a practical and cost-effective way to build upon the substantial public investment Connecticut has already made in restoring migratory fish populations. As Save the Sound notes in its testimony, providing passage at just a

small number of key dams could significantly expand available habitat and improve the production potential of species such as river herring.

Rivers Alliance also supports the clarifying language modifications proposed in the testimony of Save the Sound and referenced by the Farmington River Watershed Association. These technical changes help clarify who the commissioner's orders apply to and ensure a transparent process that includes public notice, comment, and hearing opportunities before final determinations are made.

HB 5520 reinforces a fundamental principle of river stewardship: **rivers function as connected systems**. Restoring that connectivity is essential not only for migratory fish, but also for improving water quality, strengthening ecosystem resilience, and sustaining the ecological integrity of Connecticut's watersheds.

Rivers Alliance respectfully urges the Committee to support HB 5520 with the modifications identified by our partner organizations.

Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony.