



2024 Candidate Survey on the Environment

Mary Mushinsky, Democrat
House District 85

1) Open Question:

Climate Change (especially inclusion of deployment of heat pumps, which I had submitted as a separate bill); riparian buffers (urged committee co-chairs to raise it, twice, and sponsored bill). I prepared for climate and energy efficiency legislation with 4 weeks of bipartisan energy training in 2023. I also submitted and argued before 2 committees the Environmental Rights Amendment (I switched from the hostile Env. Cmte. to the more friendly GAE Cmte.) These will be top priorities again.

2) Climate:

Will you support paying for increased investments in clean energy and our electric grid infrastructure to ensure a healthy environment that will reduce reliance on fossil fuel and nuclear energy (and ultimately reduce costs to ratepayers)?

- Yes
Changes to energy sources and updated efficiency standards to buildings and transportation are essential. For immediate use, we have the new regional federal grant of \$450 m, of which \$100 m can be used in CT. I favor changing PURA statutes to make clear that utility investment in climate change prevention and efficiency is authorized and encouraged, and should be phased in to protect ratepayers.

3) Nature-Based Solutions:

Will you support a stand-alone bill that authorizes and prioritizes the use of nature-based solutions (forests, trees, wetlands, riparian buffers, healthy organic soils, and other natural ecosystems) as the preferred alternative, where appropriate, across all agencies?

- Yes
This was the only other significant section of HB 5004, the climate bill, in my view (other than heat pumps) and it died with 5004. There

are ongoing conflicts that must be clarified: especially the current use of untouched forest tracts for community solar production, which is not what the legislature intended. Intact forests protect against climate change and must not be sacrificed to make more profit from building solar on virgin rather than developed land. Instead, we should promote canopy solar in developed areas. Vegetated river and wetland buffers protect water quality and quantity better than any expensive technology and save taxpayers money.

4) Clean Cars and Trucks Emissions Standards:

Do you support Connecticut's adoption of the latest California emissions standards for cars and trucks?

- Yes

There is well-organized opposition to the transition to clean cars and trucks, and my concern for people living beside highway corridors and experiencing health issues and higher cancer risk due to emissions is mocked. There needs to be a more visible, outspoken effort by health advocates and urban health experts to make any headway on this issue.

5) Environmental Rights Amendment:

Will you support an Environmental Rights Amendment to our State Constitution?

- Yes

I submitted the original bill and argued before 2 committees for the Environmental Rights Amendment (I decided to switch from the hostile Env. Cmte. to the more friendly GAE Cmte.). This worked better, as the GAE Cmte. actually voted the bill out. The Attorney General wants to water down the language, however, most likely because the Amendment would allow citizens to bring suit against the state. In other states, this is a rare occurrence and happens only when citizen complaints are ignored for a long time.

6) Food Waste Diversion:

Will you support designating food scraps as a "recyclable" item and requiring large-scale food generators to create plans to donate edible food?

- Yes

Several of us legislators have tried to move this idea forward for 3 years and failed. I have recommended we start with large generators first and add smaller generators in successive years. This

method would help develop predictable markets and delivery systems for the surplus and waste food.

7) Neonicotinoids:

Will you help push for legislation to ban the sale and use of neonics for non-agricultural use in Connecticut?

- Yes

I file this bill every year. The opposition by the application industry is formidable. It is also clear from the floor debate that misinformation is rampant. This bill is no threat to farmers.

8) Rodenticides:

Will you support banning the use of certain rodenticides, with a few well-defined exceptions, to help prevent the deaths of its unintended victims?

- Yes

I recommend we start in the Senate next time as Sen. Duff is a strong proponent. The bill should include a hierarchy of rodent control that includes using closed dumpsters to block food access as the first requirement for reducing rodent populations. This is the current approach of NYC. Bushnell Park in Hartford still uses open dumpsters surrounded by multiple rodenticide traps.

9) Environmental Justice:

Will you support a legislative fix to Connecticut's Environmental Justice statutes to include all polluting facilities?

- Yes

Be careful with writing this one. A new facility can be advantageous if regulators can use the permitting process to remove and clean up existing facilities that have been damaging the community for years. I live in an environmental justice community (a census tract in Wallingford).

10) Bears:

Will you support legislation that requires humane responses to conflicts with wildlife such as providing better support for the public seeking help, removing attractants, minimizing shooting incidents, and strengthening programs to deal with orphaned wildlife?

- Yes

This is a bit like the rat problem in an earlier question. People aren't allowed to provide food for bears in national parks, and should have to follow similar best practices in CT's bear-prone municipalities.

Bear-proof trash cans and wire-suspended or seasonally removed bird feeders help reduce unwanted bear/people residential conflicts.

11) Tree Cutting Protocols:

Will you support legislation to require stronger science-based tree cutting protocols based on conservation values?

- Yes

My district includes homeowners who are greatly disturbed by tree removal and subsequent loss of shade and privacy. I have learned there is no current DOT funding in place to replace these missing trees. I do support removal for public safety, but there should be a replacement program to plant bushes or evergreens.

There is also a new problem of conflict between community solar and forest removal, as noted in my response to an earlier question. Some developers are choosing to site solar farms by clearing intact forests (there is an application in Hamden to cut the forest to provide power to West Haven) because it is cheaper than using developed land. Forests have their own value in conservation and climate change prevention and state law should recognize this.

12) Ranked Choice Voting:

Should Connecticut pursue Ranked Choice Voting?

- Yes

I have co-sponsored this bill.

CANDIDATE COMMITMENT TO WORK ON ENVIRONMENTAL LEGISLATION

If you support any or all of our top priority legislation during the 2025 session, will you add your name as a legislative co-sponsor?

- Yes

Will you plan to attend our annual Environmental Summit in January?

- Yes

If requested, will you meet with CTLCV at least once during the legislative session to review priority legislation?

- Yes