



## **TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF HB 5218**

AAC THE ESTABLISHMENT OF RIPARIAN BUFFERS AND REVISION OF CERTAIN INLAND WETLANDS PROVISIONS

February 28, 2024

**To:** Co-Chairs Sen. Lopes and Rep. Gresko, Vice Chairs Sen. Hochadel and Rep. Palm, Ranking Members Sen. Harding and Rep. Callahan, and Distinguished Members of the Environment Committee

**From:** Lori Brown, Executive Director, CT League of Conservation Voters

Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony in strong support of HB 5218 that will protect natural vegetation and establish protective setbacks from waterways and wetlands.

Maintaining a strip of natural, native plants along riverbanks—a “riparian buffer”— filters out pollutants, prevents erosion, reduces flood damage, provides food and shelter for wildlife, and shades the water to keep it hospitable for cold-water fish like trout.

**According to Rivers Alliance of Connecticut, our state has the least protective buffer standards of all the New England states.**

With climate change and escalating development pressures, our water resources face imminent threats. Failure to address these challenges will result in water quality decline, heightened risks to personal property, and diminished safety of our communities due to flooding and droughts.

Additionally, with rising temperatures, our streams are experiencing an increase in harmful **algal blooms**, including in our drinking water supply watersheds. Riparian buffers are one of the most cost-effective and efficient nature-based solutions for providing shade and reducing nitrogen loads for bodies of surface water.

**Without a regulatory framework, we are losing this important “natural infrastructure”.**

**Connecticut can protect our waters and the habitats around them.** CTLCV urges the Committee to support HB 5218 that encourages landowners to leave buffers and protect wetlands by:

- 1) Allowing the use of state stormwater funds to incentivize buffers
- 2) Developing state set-back requirements so new construction is not too close to riverbanks and wetlands
- 3) Strengthening training and education for local boards that protect inland wetlands
- 4) Requiring DEEP to update the comprehensive training program for inland wetland boards to reflect changes in case law

Thank you for considering these comments to improve protections for our state's water resources that provide so many co-benefits for people and wildlife.

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