

CONNECTICUT Land Conservation Council

Testimony on House Bill No. 5218
Environment Committee
Submitted by Amy Blaymore Paterson, Executive Director
February 28, 2024

Co-Chairs Lopes and Gresko, Vice-Chairs Hochadel and Palm, Ranking Members Harding and Callahan, and members of the Environment Committee:

The Connecticut Land Conservation Council (CLCC) is the state's umbrella organization for the land conservation community, including its ~120 land trusts. CLCC is a 501(c)(3) organization operating statewide. Our mission is to elevate and strengthen land conservation in Connecticut.

Thank you for this opportunity to present testimony in favor of **House Bill No. 5218, An Act Concerning The Establishment Of Riparian Buffers And Revision Of Certain Inland Wetlands Provisions**, which seeks to develop buffers and setbacks from waterways and wetlands and require certain inland wetlands training and materials.

In all capacities, CLCC's goal is to safeguard our natural and working lands, prioritize the vital role of nature-based solutions in mitigating the escalating effects of the inter-related crises of climate change and biodiversity loss, and ensure that everyone everywhere has access to the benefits of nature. It is through this lens CLCC offers the following testimony concerning HB 5218.

Section 1: Streamside or riparian buffers are naturalized, vegetated areas that run alongside streams, other waterbodies, and aquatic systems, like wetlands. They are critical nature-based solutions—maintaining healthy riparian ecosystems, including filtering and decreasing pollution, controlling erosion and sedimentation, providing wildlife habitat, sequestering and storing carbon, and protecting biodiversity.

Like other land important for its conservation values, streamside buffers may be protected through a conservation easement. CLCC supports HB 5218, which allows DEEP to utilize stormwater infrastructure funds to acquire conservation easements from willing landowners who wish to preserve streamside buffers on their property.

Sections 2 and 3: The Connecticut Inland Wetlands and Watercourses Act (IWWA) was passed in 1972 to protect the environmental quality of the state's inland wetlands and watercourses (CGS sections 22a-36 et seq). Amended in 1987, the IWWA requires regulation of inland wetlands and watercourses through local commissions (IWWCs) operating under the established system of state regulatory oversight. CLCC supports Section 2 of HB 5218, requiring DEEP to update the comprehensive training program for IWWCs to include all changes to the IWWA and reporting requirements applicable to IWWCs. CLCC also supports Section 3, strengthening the requisite training requirements and educational materials available for IWWCs. Most IWWC members are local volunteers who have yet to gain professional expertise in wetlands science. It is essential that they are required to attend training to ensure their decisions are accurate and legally defensible.

Thank you for this opportunity to provide our comments and for all you do. I would be happy to answer any questions you may have.

