

# CONNECTICUT Land Conservation Council

Testimony -House Bill No. 5170  
Planning and Development Committee  
Submitted by Amy Blaymore Paterson, Executive Director  
February 21, 2024

Co-Chairs Kavros-DeGraw and Rahman, Vice-Chairs Chafee and Needleman, Ranking Members Zullo and Fazio, and members of the Planning and Development Committee:

*The Connecticut Land Conservation Council (CLCC) is the state's umbrella organization for the land conservation community, including its ~120 land trusts. We advocate for land conservation, stewardship, and funding and work to ensure the long-term strength and viability of Connecticut's land conservation community.*

Thank you for this opportunity to present testimony regarding **House Bill No. 5170, An Act Concerning Extensions Of Time For Certain Municipal Commission, Board And Agency Decisions And Training For Inland Wetlands Agencies.**

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 (IWW) through local commissions (IWWCs) operating under the established system of state regulatory oversight.

CLCC aligns our position concerning HB5170 with those outlined in the testimony of Rivers Alliance of Connecticut, presented by Alicea Charamut, its Executive Director. Our comments on the proposed changes to this long-standing and essential regulatory system are as follows:

**Section 1:** CLCC supports this section, which would strengthen the requisite training and reporting requirements for IWWCs tasked with implementing local regulations promulgated under the IWWA. 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. The proposed training program consists of eight modules available online. The bill gives IWWC members a year to complete the training, which provides ample time and flexibility.

**Section 2:** CLCC opposes a reduction for a time extension from 65 days to 45 days. This reduced time frame would be unduly burdensome for IWWC members—local volunteers—municipal staff, and consultants by likely necessitating a special meeting in order to meet the requirement. It may also force IWWCs into short-cutting the review process for complex projects.

Wetlands are essential as wildlife habitats, key to water quality, flood prevention, and vector disease control, and crucial to protecting biodiversity and mitigating the impacts of climate change. Given the rate at which wetlands have disappeared – staggering losses of up to 65% in Connecticut – and their critical ecological function, we must ensure that our laws and policies are structured to protect our remaining wetland resources to the greatest extent possible. Strengthening training requirements will help; condensing the review process will not.

Thank you for this opportunity to provide input on this vital topic. I would be happy to answer any questions you may have.

