



STATE OF CONNECTICUT

COUNCIL ON ENVIRONMENTAL QUALITY

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Executive Director

February 27, 2024

Re: Raised House Bill 5218 - An Act Concerning the Establishment of Riparian Buffers and Revision of Certain Inland Wetlands Provisions

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

The Council on Environmental Quality (Council) is a nine-member board that works independently of the Department of Energy and Environmental Protection (DEEP) to assess the condition of Connecticut's environment and report its findings annually to the Governor; recommend actions to improve state environmental programs; advise other state agencies on the environmental impacts of proposed projects; and investigate citizens' complaints and allegations of violations of environmental laws.

The Council **supports** the provisions of House Bill 5218 that would provide for the acquisition of conservation easements located along streams and rivers and would require the property owner to maintain native trees, shrubs and herbaceous cover, in lieu of a lawn, as a buffer along such stream or river. This is important for improving water quality and protecting the vital functions of wetlands. The Council also **supports** the provision that would require staff and each existing member of an inland wetlands agency to complete the Municipal Inland Wetlands Agency Comprehensive Training Program¹ by June 1, 2026, and within one year of a member's appointment or such staff person's hiring, and at least once every five years thereafter. The existing online training program for wetland agencies' staff and members, municipal officials, and interested parties has been well received and provides instruction and guidance on the provisions of the Inland Wetlands and Watercourses Act and the protection of wetland resources. Since the members of an inland wetland agency collectively are responsible for regulating activities that could impact inland wetlands, it is important that each member of an inland wetland agency undertake the training. As noted in the Council's 2008 special report, *Swamped*², training of inland wetland agency commissioners and staff members was associated with the alteration of fewer wetland acres for each permit granted.

Thank you for consideration of these comments.

Sincerely,

Paul Aresta,
Executive Director

¹ CT DEEP Municipal Inland Wetlands Agency Comprehensive Training Program; https://clear.uconn.edu/training/ct-deep-training-certificate-courses/deep_iwa_training/

² Council on Environmental Quality, <https://portal.ct.gov/-/media/CEQ/SWAMPEDwithlinkspdf.pdf>