



**For the Environment Committee
Testimony of Alicea Charamut, Executive Director
February 23, 2022**

Rivers Alliance was formed to fight for sound water policies at the state and federal levels, to provide education on water resources, and to advocate for any person or group striving to protect water. If you want clean, free-flowing and healthy rivers, and high-quality drinking water, Rivers Alliance is here to help.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony on the following raised bill before you today.

HB 5143 AA Establishing and Office of Aquatic Invasive Species – SUPPORT with modifications

I can't thank the committee and Representative Palm enough for raising this extremely important issue.

It is essential that our agencies and our communities have resources available to respond to existing and emerging threats from aquatic invasive species (AIS) in all of its waters. Investment in a coordinated effort that includes effective prevention, education, and control in rivers, lakes, and ponds is critical to protecting the ecological and economic value that these waters provide is critical.

Office of Aquatic Invasive Species

We support the creation of an Office of Aquatic Invasive Species at the Connecticut Agricultural Experiment Station (CAES.) CAES has extensive expertise in aquatic invasive plant research.

An Already Existing Resource – Invasive Plants Council

However, CAES's primary mission is research. The natural entity for coordination and liaison responsibilities already exists with the Invasive Plants Council (IPC.) The IPC is established in statute (cgs Sec. 22a-381 through 22a-381e) and membership consists of: The Commissioner of Agriculture, or the commissioner's designee; the Commissioner of Energy and Environmental Protection, or the commissioner's designee; the director of the Connecticut Agricultural Experiment Station, or the director's designee; the dean of the College of Agriculture and Natural Resources at The University of Connecticut, or the dean's designee; a representative of Invasive Plant Atlas of New England appointed by the minority leader of the Senate; one representative of a nonprofit environment association with a demonstrated knowledge of invasive plants appointed by the speaker of the House of Representatives; one representative of a nonprofit association concerned with

growers and retailers of plants and flowers appointed by the president pro tempore of the Senate; one representative of a nonprofit association concerned with oceans, lakes and rivers appointed by the Governor; and one representative from a company that grows or sells flowers and plants appointed by the minority leader of the House of Representatives. Unfortunately, this council has not met for several years. **This council provides the representation needed to address emerging threats across agencies and stakeholders.**

Expanding Available Resources

Improvement in how our state responds to aquatic invasive species cannot be achieved within available resources. Funds from the recently established Invasive Species Stamp have provided much needed funding for control, research, and education programs to organizations working at local levels. It is our understanding that a portion of the Invasive Species Stamp funding is being considered to partially fund a position (shared with the University of Connecticut) to coordinate the IPC. Spreading this funding too thin will only result in fewer resources local organizations and agencies.

Two options for increasing funds

- Establish a “Save our Waterways” license plate, proceeds of which could fund expansion of educational programs and increase in staffing needed to focus on aquatic invasive plants. Alternatively, the existing “Save our Lakes and Ponds” license plate can be renamed to “Save our Waterways.”
- Create a fine for municipalities that discharge water containing invasive plants into Connecticut waterways.