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Subject: S.96 concerns

Rep. Sheldon and Committee Members,

Over the course of the last two weeks you have received numerous comments about S. 96. You also heard from my colleague Ron Rhodes about Connecticut River Conservancy's concerns about the current structure of this bill. While Matt Chapman and the Agency of Natural Resources have heard some of the concerns of the groups around the state that actually implement clean water projects, I am afraid that his suggested changes to the legislation do not go far enough to protect and restore the waters of the whole state.

Connecticut River Conservancy agrees with the comments provided by Lyn Munno and the suggested language changes provided by Gianna Petito on behalf of Natural Resources Conservation Commission (NRCC) and the Vermont Association of Conservation Districts (VACD). With our local watershed partners, CRC services half of the state regarding clean water issues. We are very concerned that the legislation as currently written will roll back the intentions of Act 64 to protect and restore all waters of the state.

Additionally, limiting the amount of funding for Water Quality Enhancement funds, the only money that would be available statewide, to \$1.5 million is going to drastically reduce the ability of watershed organizations to leverage additional funds from federal and other private funding sources. We agree with our watershed partners that this amount should be at least \$5 million, but ideally should be raised to \$10 million. This money needs to be accessible across the state on an equitable basis to make sure that the resources are not concentrated in one area. There are already an abundance of organizations focused on the cleanup of Lake Champlain and those organizations are able to leverage additional funding for that work. The Connecticut River watershed makes up the entire eastern half of the state and S. 96 as currently written would provide for very little money for clean water work in the Connecticut River watershed.

Accountability for the reduction in pollutant loads needs to reside with the Agency of Natural Resources. It is the state's responsibility to protect and restore all of the waters of Vermont and the legislature should maintain appropriate accountability for this. It is not appropriate to try to make other organizations that rely on state funding for their work become the responsible party for our clean water obligations.

Thank you so much for your work on this issue!

Best,

Kathy Urffer

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Kathy Urffer  
River Steward

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Conservancy**



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