

Energy and Technology Committee JOINT FAVORABLE REPORT

Bill No.: HB-6850

Title: AN ACT CONCERNING HYDROPOWER.

Vote Date: 3/14/2023

Vote Action: Joint Favorable

PH Date: 3/7/2023

File No.:

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SPONSORS OF BILL:

[Rep. Holly H. Cheeseman, 37th Dist.](#)

REASONS FOR BILL:

Connecticut needs to expand its energy infrastructure to satisfy its future energy demands while finding alternative energy sources to help it reach its zero-carbon goals and renewable targets. Developing, procuring, and employing hydropower assets may benefit both goals. Hydropower is a renewable energy source that utilizes water (from precipitation, rivers, and lakes) to create energy without producing greenhouse gas emissions. Further study may be required to assess Connecticut's potential benefits regarding increased hydropower assets. Therefore, this bill intends to further the legislature's understanding of hydropower as a viable option for clean and low-carbon energy in Connecticut, pursuing the state's carbon emissions reduction goals and renewable targets.

RESPONSE FROM ADMINISTRATION/AGENCY:

N/A

NATURE AND SOURCES OF SUPPORT:

Cary Lynch, Climate and Policy Manager, The Nature Conservancy – Fully supports H.B. 6580 because their organization, the Nature Conservancy, is focused on low-carbon energy solutions; hydropower is low-carbon. The Nature Conservancy states that although hydropower has a low environmental impact, they are concerned with specific ecological impacts: “A dam that diverts water to a run of-river hydropower plant may obstruct fish migration. A dam and reservoir can also change natural water temperatures, water chemistry, river flow characteristics, and silt loads” (Cary Lynch; The Nature Conservancy Testimony; March 7, 2023). Such changes can negatively affect the river ecology by disturbing native plants and animals. Additionally, the Nature Conservancy believes that more thorough research should be employed to lead to solutions that work with energy development and natural rivers.

Francis Pullaro, Executive Director, RENEW Northeast, Inc. –

Supports H.B. 6850 because hydropower facilities are carbon-free energy sources and have approximately the exact operational costs as other renewable energy facilities. However, they would like the study to emphasize maintaining Connecticut's hydropower resources as viable options to help the state reach its zero greenhouse emissions goals by 2040 under Public Act 22-5.

Anne Schmidt, Group Leader, Citizens' Climate Education – Supports H.B. 6850 to study hydropower in the state.

NATURE AND SOURCES OF OPPOSITION:

Steve Zuretti, Senior Director, Origination and Policy, Brookfield Renewable

Though Brookfield Renewable takes no position on the bill as introduced, they recommend that the committee considers several adjustments to support small-scale hydropower operations and allow them to help Connecticut meet its clean energy and climate goals. First, they suggest amending the Class I re-licensed hydropower provision to support retaining small-scale hydropower operations in the state. Secondly, they recommend making changes to:

- “Allow eligibility of re-licensed reservoir hydropower in addition to run-of-river hydropower to expand facilities that can participate under this provision; “Increase the cap on re-licensed hydropower that can be used for RPS compliance (for example, increasing from 1% of annual load to 3%) to ensure expanded supply of Class I RECs is balanced with expanded demand of Class I RECs; and
- “Clarify that qualifying re-licensed hydropower facilities must be 30 MW or less to limit eligibility to small-scale hydropower in alignment with the 30 MW eligibility limitation applicable to run of river hydro with a commercial operations date of not earlier than July 1, 2003, as intended” (Steve Zuretti; Brookfield Renewable Testimony; March 7, 2023).

Alicea Charamut, Executive Director, Rivers Alliance of CT

The bill's scope and the Public Utilities Regulatory Authority's (PURA's) role concerning hydropower's utilization are uncertain. Rivers Alliance of CT acknowledges that (although hydropower provides clean, carbon-free energy) it can negatively impact the surrounding ecosystem. This fact should be considered before employing hydropower in more areas. Furthermore, they discuss the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission (FERC) licensing for small hydropower operations, which are exempt when 10 megawatts or less; about 32% are exempt, and 10% do not fall under FERC jurisdiction, which could negatively impact the river's health. Finally, they state that there should be more transparency on publicly made information regarding methods of hydropower operation in New England. They would happily work with the state to provide a river health perspective concerning hydropower.

The following also oppose HB 6850:

Three speakers **opposed** HB 6850 because it would the State of Connecticut's time, money, and resources by studying issues that have already been investigated. Instead, the state should instead divert resources into its existing hydropower infrastructure to support their continued use. While they oppose HB 6850, they express support for H.B. 6236 & H.B. 6499, which they believe would supply equitable energy purchase rates for hydropower.

Additionally, they discuss the benefits of diverting resources into existing hydropower

infrastructure: tax revenue, jobs, clean energy, and removal of pollution (garbage) from Connecticut's rivers:

- Rolland Zeleny, Energy Stream & Saywatt Hydroelectric LLC
- Duncan S. Broatch, Chairperson, CSPPA
- Charles Rosenfield, Treasurer & Chief Executive Officer, Putnam Hydropower Inc.

Reported by: Gregory Chipchak & Robert Downes

Date: March 14, 2023