

# Environment Committee JOINT FAVORABLE REPORT

**Bill No.:** HB-5349

**Title:** AN ACT CONCERNING THE PERFORMANCE OF A POLLEN COUNT.

**Vote Date:** 3/20/2024

**Vote Action:** Joint Favorable

**PH Date:** 3/15/2024

**File No.:**

***Disclaimer:** The following JOINT FAVORABLE Report is prepared for the benefit of the members of the General Assembly, solely for purposes of information, summarization and explanation and does not represent the intent of the General Assembly or either chamber thereof for any purpose.*

## **SPONSORS OF BILL:**

Environment Committee

Rep. Hector Arzeno, 151st Dist.

Rep. Patricia A. Dillon, 92nd Dist.

Rep. Julio A. Concepcion, 4th Dist.

Sen. Saud Anwar, 3rd Dist.

## **REASONS FOR BILL:**

Pollen is one of the most common allergens, with up to 26% of adults reacting to it. Since the closure of the 2022 Waterbury Hospital pollen monitoring machine, the state of Connecticut has been without any measuring and reporting systems. This can adversely impact the ability for information on high pollen content to be created, especially as historical trends often used for forecasting are skewed because of the impact of climate change, ultimately harming individuals with allergies and asthma impacted by pollen.

## **RESPONSE FROM ADMINISTRATION/AGENCY:**

**Katie Dykes, Commissioner, CT Department of Energy and Environmental Protection**

The Commissioner expresses the belief that DEEP does not have the resources to carry out the work which the bill would impose on them. They suggest working with the committee to find a solution, including reaching out to other entities who have expressed interest in conducting the pollen monitoring.

## **NATURE AND SOURCES OF SUPPORT:**

**Maritza Bond, MPH, Director of Health, City of New Haven**

The Director notes the link between climate change and increasing pollen seasons, with earlier starts, more northerly range, and increased intensity. The Director of Health also notes

the links between pollution levels and increased immune reactions to allergens. She believes in the necessity for an accurate pollen count, allowing for officials to produce advisory notices to allow for individuals to plan preventative measures prior to symptoms. They note that Waterbury Hospital has not updated their pollen levels since August 2022; a DEEP surveillance system would provide citizens with greater access to information.

**Dr. Mark Mitchell, Emeritus Professor, George Mason University**

The Professor notes that Hartford, Bridgeport, and New Haven have been named allergy capitals of the United States by the American Lung Association. The testifier decries the single pollen count machine which broke in 2022, as well as the impending retirement of Dr. Randolph, leaving the state without a method of tracking pollen concentrations. They discussed the issue with DEEP, who agreed to a trial fully automated machine program with Yale, requiring funds of roughly \$300,000 (which they suggest can come from the American Rescue Plan Act or via bonding). The testifier concludes by bringing attention to thunderstorm asthma attacks and the threat to localized healthcare, which occur due to high pollen counts being broken down further by electrical conditions during the storms.

**Dr. Christopher Randolph, MD Allergist, Waterbury Hospital**

The testifier ran the Waterbury Hospital pollen and mold counting center from 1986–2023, operating 5 days a week during pollen season. They recount the troubles they had when the machine broke in 2022, and the impact pollen has on individuals throughout the population. They urge the reintroduction of a tracking program, as it will allow for further research and is invaluable for understanding the impact climate change has on pollen in our state.

**Gary Soffer, MD, Assistant Professor, Yale University**

The testifier links allergies to depression, with rates 2.7x higher in those with severe allergies. They note Connecticut's high pollen counts, and how the previous tracking was done by Waterbury hospital, whose machine broke and was unable to be replaced. They also note the risks climate change have in hindering our ability to predict pollen counts, necessitating the need for accurate readings.

**Katelyn Wong, MD**

The testifiers discussed the impact of allergies on the states pediatric population, with many children missing school and expressing concern about the role climate change will have on future pollen levels.

**Sanjiv Godse, MD, Chair, Connecticut Health Professionals for Climate Action**

The testifier supports providing individuals with a reliable source of information on pollen counts in the state, as it will allow them to take preventative measures to manage symptoms. They note the lack of a functioning pollen machine in the state after the closure of the 2022 Waterbury facility. They also address the climates' role on pollen season.

**Michaela Gabrielle Serafica, APRN Student, Yale School of Nursing**

The testifier focusses on the issues pollen has on children, impacting their sports participation, outside activity, and going to school. They also recount the problems with the Waterbury Hospital closing down the final pollen machine.

**Chase Lindemann Esq, Fellow, Save the Sound**

The testifier expressed concern for the impact of pollen on asthma cases in Connecticut, as

well as sharing concern on the role climate change will have on future cases. They

**Aaron Hultgren, MD**

The testifier stated their belief that an official pollen count would help to facilitate research efforts into the impact of pollen on individuals, and how the allergies can be managed with data after the closure of the Waterbury machine.

**Julie Flom, MD, Assistant Professor**

The testifier discusses the problem of allergic rhinitis, which affects roughly 15% of the population and causes asthma, eczema, sinusitis, tension and migraine headaches, anxiety, depression and or cognitive impairment. They note the impact pollen can have on asthma and sleep quality, with the knock-on effects on school performance. They also note the different rates of asthma in different racial communities, with non-hispanic black children having nearly 30% asthma rates. It is their belief that the pollen count would allow for us to further the fight against asthma related issues.

**Kenneth Mendez, President, Asthma and Allergy Foundation of America**

The Foundation stated the high prevalence of allergies in the American population, noting how climate change has lengthened the pollen season drastically. They note the difference between pollen counts and pollen forecasts, with the former being measured in the moment and the latter depending on historical data to predict.

**Aziz Dehkan, Executive Director & Allison Pilcher, Policy Director; CT Rountable on Climate Jobs**

The testifiers note the importance of an accurate pollen count in allowing healthcare professionals to treat and advise those in society most vulnerable to allergies. They also note the ecological importance of such a count, as it can help to monitor and guide conservation efforts in the environment.

**Ava Schrage**

The testifier expresses support for the bill.

**NATURE AND SOURCES OF OPPOSITION:**

None expressed.

**Reported by: Jim McNealey**

**Date: April 2<sup>nd</sup>, 2024**