

**Public Hearing of the Government, Administration, and Elections Committee**  
**Testimony of Susan Eastwood**  
**March 13, 2024**  
**In SUPPORT of SJ 193,**  
**A RESOLUTION PROPOSING AN AMENDMENT TO THE STATE CONSTITUTION**  
**REGARDING ENVIRONMENTAL RIGHTS.**

Dear Co-Chairs Sen. Flexer and Rep. Blumenthal, Vice-Chairs Sen. Slap and Rep. Morrin Bello, Ranking Members Sen. Sampson, and Rep. Mastrofrancesco, and Members of the Government Administration and Elections Committee:

My name is Susan Eastwood, and I am a resident of Ashford, Chair of the Ashford Clean Energy Task Force, and the Chapter Chair of Sierra Club Connecticut.

Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony on SJ 193. I strongly support SJ 193, a resolution to put the CT Environmental Rights Amendment on the ballot, because I believe that all people deserve clean air, water, and a livable environment. This is a fundamental human right and should be codified as such in the Connecticut Constitution.

If approved by Connecticut voters, CT Environmental Rights Amendment would protect our citizens' rights to a stable climate, to clean and healthy air, water and would require the state to do so equitably. A Constitutional amendment would guarantee that future generations would be assured of environmental rights as a human right in perpetuity.

This is not just an aspirational proposal. The amendment would have practical impacts as well. All state agencies would need to consider environmental rights at every level of decision-making, legislating, and making regulations. Citizens and municipalities would have the right to defend their, now Constitutional, rights in court.

[Climate lawsuits are on the rise](#) with cascading climate disasters setting the stage for urgent action. Looking back, we find past lawsuits or requests for rulemaking that failed.

In Connecticut, [Our Children's Trust](#) filed a [petition with the Connecticut Department of Environmental Protection](#) in 2011 requesting "the promulgation of a regulation to strictly limit and regulate fossil fuel carbon dioxide emissions, and to establish an effective emissions reduction strategy that will achieve an atmospheric concentration no greater than 350 ppm of carbon dioxide by 2100."

It was denied.

These cases give me an eerie feeling, a Cassandra-like effect of prophecies come true. Just as our governments have ignored the [warnings of science](#) for decades, the courts and agencies have denied many of these cases, including a suit for more [water rights for Indigenous peoples in Maui](#), where they recently suffered from a lack of water to fight the tragic fire that destroyed Lahaina.

Around the country (and the world), more and more lawsuits are being brought to demand redress for an unhealthy environment. The most compelling are those brought by the youth whose futures are threatened by the climate crisis. The cases are most likely to move forward in states that have already enshrined environmental rights in their Constitutions, such as Montana. On August 14, 2023, [16 brave young people won a landmark climate lawsuit](#) on environmental rights which will impact future cases and all our futures. [Judge Kathy Seeley ruled in favor of the plaintiffs in Held versus Montana](#). The decision held that the government of Montana violated the right of the plaintiffs to a clean and healthful environment as guaranteed by the Montana State Constitution.

Legal actions led by Indigenous groups, [our youth](#), and advocacy organizations, like [Earthjustice](#) and [Sierra Club](#), continue the fight to protect our environment and public health. I hope all these efforts create a drumbeat, backed up by all of our participation in whatever way is best for us, whether it is working for energy efficiency in your home or community, participating in the legislative process, or marching for a better world.

I strongly support putting environmental rights into the Connecticut Constitution and urge the Committee to support SJ 193.

Sincerely,

Susan Eastwood  
Ashford