



Interreligious Eco-Justice Network
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Re: HB 5004, An Act Concerning Protecting the Environment and the Development of Renewable Energy Sources and Related Job Sectors.

Dear Senator Lopes, Rep Parker, Senator Hochadel, Rep. Bumgartner, and esteemed members of the Environment Committee,

Thank you for giving me the opportunity to submit testimony in support of *HB 5004, An Act Concerning Protecting the Environment and the Development of Renewable Energy Sources and Related Job Sectors.*

The Interreligious Eco-Justice Network is a faith-based environmental organization that works with religious communities across Connecticut on environmental issues, such as climate change, toxic pollution, and species loss.

Every faith tradition speaks of our role as stewards of the planet and people of faith are very aware of the idea that they are called to use resources responsibly and without causing harm. The decisions they make are guided not only by their budgets, but by their faith.

IREJN has helped hundreds of congregations reduce their energy consumption, install clean energy measures, plant organic vegetable and pollinator gardens, reduce single-use plastic, and eliminate toxic cleaning chemicals. Throughout this testimony, I have incorporated examples of how faith communities are incorporating environmentally-friendly practices.

CLIMATE CHANGE

IREJN supports updating the Global Warming Solutions Act and emissions targets. IREJN supports updating the GWSA, which would require greenhouse gas emissions to be reduced by a minimum of 65% below 2001 levels by 2040. We support updating the 2050 goal to require the state to achieve net-zero emission by 2050.

IREJN Supports a Docket on the Future of Gas This bill would require PURA to open up a docket on the future of gas in Connecticut as it

relates to the state's climate goals. IREJN strongly supports this; gas dockets have been opened up in several other states, including Massachusetts. A future of gas docket will be needed to address equity and affordability as energy efficiency and the move to clean energy will reduce the market share for gas. As more people add solar and electrify their homes, the customer base for gas will shrink, leading to higher costs for the remaining customers. The future of gas docket will help create a plan to ensure that these customers are not faced with increasing costs of supporting infrastructure and higher rates.

ENERGY EFFICIENCY

In 2023, IREJN decided to concentrate on how climate change intersected with other areas of need or inequity. Energy efficiency has been a natural choice – it reduces energy use and costs, it reduces air pollution and greenhouse gas emissions, and it improves health outcomes and quality of life. Since IREJN began our energy efficiency focus, hundreds of congregations in Connecticut have implemented a variety of protocols to reduce their energy use and their greenhouse gas emissions, and to increase their use of clean energy.

Because the cleanest and cheapest energy is the energy you don't use, we are glad to see strong support for energy efficiency in HB 5004. We would like to make one recommendation with regards to energy efficiency.

Protect the Conservation Load Management Fund and support insulation and thermal building envelope projects. IREJN supports Section 23, which would provide funding for low-income individuals for barrier remediation and energy efficiency and clean energy projects. We would recommend that air-sealing and insulation be recognized as cost-effective measures to reduce energy use and emissions, because many homes in CT lack proper insulation and thermal boundary sealing. Air-sealing and insulation remains the most cost-effective way to reduce both fuel bills in the winter and air conditioning costs in the summer. Overall, they can reduce energy demand by 30%, while also providing good, local jobs. IREJN would like to see an increase in the portion of CLM funds for direct services and investments in residential services. This will be even more important if the federal government abandons commitments to energy efficiency and clean energy and it will help support the workforce that is already in place to do this critical work. IREJN also supports the addition of flood mitigation efforts to this program.

IREJN Supports Heat Pump and Heat Pump Hot Water Heaters. We also support incentivizing heat pumps – heat pumps are more energy efficient than traditional polluting systems. Despite their name, heat pumps provide heating and cooling and are much more efficient than traditional air conditioners in times of extreme heat. The summer of 2024 saw record heat waves, which resulted in extremely high utility bills. Heat pumps are also much cleaner than oil, propane, gas furnaces, hot water heaters, and boilers, which

produce 23% of CT's nitrogen oxide, a key component in smog.¹ This bill will require DEEP to develop a plan to incentivize heat pumps, specifically focusing on where they will have the most benefit. In addition, IREJN supports Section 10, which would make air and ground-source heat pumps eligible for reimbursement for school building projects. This is a common-sense approach which will reduce health-harming pollution.

Example: St. Stephen's Episcopal Church in East Haddam and Our Savior Lutheran in Thomaston are installing heat pump hot water heaters and Congregation Adath Israel in Middletown has installed heat pumps for heating and cooling.

CLEAN ENERGY

IREJN Supports Solar Canopies. Solar canopies have been identified as an excellent option for houses of worship with slate roofs. Requiring PURA to develop strategic plan and program design for solar canopies will help deploy these clean energy strategies across the state.

Example: Asylum Hill Congregational Church in Hartford is currently investigating a solar canopy.

IREJN Supports Thermal Energy Networks. Section 20 would require PURA to develop a program for thermal energy networks and require gas companies to create two projects in their territories. Thermal energy networks will provide businesses and residents with the opportunity to access clean energy. Networked geothermal energy is more efficient than individual heat pumps, which makes them an excellent option for urban areas. Eversource has successfully implemented a pilot program in Framingham, MA, and has proposed a pilot program in CT. Their proposal is currently waiting for approval from DEEP; requiring gas companies to create pilots will help move the Eversource proposal forward. In addition, Section 21 would require the gas companies to create an incentive program for thermal energy networks owned by municipalities. An incentive program in the interests of the ratepayers will help with the implementation of networked thermal energy.

Example: Round Hill Community Church in Greenwich is currently investigating a geothermal system to power their campus.

NATURE-BASED SOLUTIONS

IREJN supports the inclusion nature-based solutions. In our view, the natural world is miraculous! We support the use the nature-based strategies in HB 5004, such as living shorelines, re-forestration, climate-smart land use practices, invasive species removal, and carbon sequestration. IREJN has two recommendations. In Section 24, lines 1667-1669, the bill allows OSWA and the Urban Green and Community Garden funds to be used

¹ https://www.sierraclub.org/sites/default/files/2023-09/Connecticut%27s%20Hidden%20Pollution%20Problem_4.pdf

for commercial purposes. IREJN recommends striking that language -these funds should not be used for commercial purposes. In addition, lines 1762 -1773 allows use of these funds for wildfire mitigation. This is not an appropriate use of this funding and could significantly impact Connecticut's ability to protect open space, wildlife habitat, and drinking water. Funding to address climate change events is needed, however, and we will be submitting testimony in support of HB 6280, An Act Concerning the Establishment of a Climate Change Superfund.

With our suggestions, we urge you to pass HB 5004, An Act Concerning Protecting the Environment and the Development of Renewable Energy Sources and Related Job Sectors.

Very best regards,

Terri Eickel, Executive Director