

Government Administration and Elections Committee

JOINT FAVORABLE REPORT

Bill No: SJ-37 / [Bill Status](#) / [Public Hearing Testimony](#)

RESOLUTION PROPOSING AN AMENDMENT TO THE STATE
Title: CONSTITUTION CONCERNING ENVIRONMENTAL RIGHTS.

Vote Date: 3/23/2026

Vote Action: Joint Favorable

PH Date: 3/4/2026

File No.:

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SPONSORS OF BILL:

The Government Administration and Elections Committee

REASONS FOR BILL:

There is a growing concern over the erosion of protections pertaining to environmental rights due to changes on the federal level and other states. Connecticut has taken strides to pass laws to protect these issues through legislation, however, some worry that these laws could be easily overturned through legislation. This resolution would seek to propose an amendment to the Connecticut Constitution to enshrine these protections that Connecticut has already held and give them additional protection. This would allow citizens to vote on a constitutional amendment establishing rights to clean and healthy air, water, soil, ecosystems, and environment. It would ensure the right to equitable access to a healthy environment for all citizens of Connecticut. This amendment would also prohibit the removal of any funds supporting protection of the State's natural resources.

RESPONSE FROM ADMINISTRATION/AGENCY:

None Expressed.

NATURE AND SOURCES OF SUPPORT:

Commenters on this bill stated that they were in support of this bill because Connecticut is in need of broad, enforceable rights such as amendments passed in other parts of the country. Many specify that it is important to pass this resolution now because of the rollback of environmental protections at the federal level. It is also important to many supporters of this bill that this is a resolution for a constitutional amendment as creates a high standard that the

residents of Connecticut can rely on to keep negative environmental impact in check. Many respondents also specify that this resolution signifies care for young residents and future generations of the state who are not able to speak for themselves and who deserve a healthy environment to live in. Other respondents note that many projects or decisions made to change the environment are often made with the thought of short-term financial benefit. However, they state that this benefit outweighs the cost of an unhealthy or even inhabitable environment.

Kathleen Barret, Lynne Bonnett, Karen Camporeale, Thomas Carr, Grace Damio, Victor DeMasi, Alaina Driscoll, Amy Harris, Jesse Friedman, Patrick Hennessey, Ralph Jones, Laurie Klein, Dianna Kolaj, Mary Ellen Kunz, Stephen Lamoureux, Leslie Lee, Maureen Lopes, Laura Lynch Cyril May, Thomas Mulvaney, Micheal Nadeau, Lauren Pelletier, Cynthia Rabinowitz, Deborah Roe, Patricia Sabosik, Irene Skrybailo, Suzanne Solensky, Kimberly Stoner, Shannon Supple, Melinada Tuhus, Adrian Webber, Kathleen Zimmerman, Machabil Efendi, Kevin Banach, Catherine Bates, Clara Biessel, Sterling, Bobbitt, Lourdes Brown, Vance Cannon, Ginger Chapman, Jefferey Clup, Jennifer Dayton, Margret Dobbins, Roger Emerick, Hedley Freake, Nathan Frohling, Susan Halpern, Zachary Havaneck, Laurie Heiss, Julie Hulten, Sebastian Kadlof, Jennifer Kleindienst, Sydney Kolz, Julianna Larue, Hila Lehman, Andrew Lopez, Sage Maire, Shirley McCarthy, Kathy Meyering, Lynn Murdock, Jessica Olander, Annie Perkins, Stuart Rabinowitz, Marian Sachdeva, Lilliana Sarju, Gabriel Slaughter, Diane St John, Shawn Sullivan, Sandy Tosi, Carol Waxman, Mary Wison, Keith Ainsworth, Claudia Allen, Holley Atkinson, Suzanne Barber, Janet Bellamy, Owen Bissel, William Bland, Eleanor Blomstrom, Joy Bonitz, Tom Cameron, Juliet Cain, JM Cafiero, Susi Byers, Jane Brawerman, Catherine Bowdren, Lynne Bonnett, Robert Chapin, Susan Chapin, Matthew Conrad, Allison Correia, Jeffery Crothers, Anne Cummings, Lisa Dahill, Maryellen Donnelly, Katherine Dzikiewicz, Teresa Eickel, Lisa Elder, Roger Emerick, Dwayne Escola, Robert Essman, Kerstin Forrester, Hedley Freake, Elena Frey, Jesse Friedman, Tiricia George, Betsy Goldberg, Eric Goldberg, Aaron Goode, Margret Goodwin, Dawn Handschuh, Amy Har, Rachel Heerema, Patrick Hennessey, Ralph Jones, Laurie Klien, Diane Hoffman, Mary Hogue, Meg Hourigan, Julie Hulten, Diane Jamieson, Roman Jamieson, Emma Kenyon, Charles Kenyon, Sam King, Laurie Klein, Myra Klockenbrink, Elleen Kopec, Irwin Krieger, Joyce Leiz, Diane Lentakis, Andrew Lopez, Natalia Lopez, Laura Lynch, Sage Maier, Thomas Mariconda, Mike Markovits, Cyril May, Michele May, Shirley McCarthy, Thomas Mead, Donna Merrill, Sarah Middelmeer, Kaleigh Mitchell, Meagan Moore, William Nygren, Jon Olson, Susan Olson, Amy Paterson, Lauren Pellertier, Annie Perkins, Douglas Perkins, Aimee Petras, Bradford Picarello, Deborah Pike, Elyse Poller, Merle Potchinsky, Jack Potter, Nathaniel Putnam, Cynthia Rabinowitz, Stuart Rabinowitz, Cate Rauch, Dave Rauch, Susan Robinson, Deborah Roe, Patricia Sabosik, Marion Sachdeva, Denise Savageau, Anne Schmidt, Aubrey Schultz, Martha Schwartzkopf, Chris Schweitzer, Joan Seguin, Mary Sherwin, Alan Siniscalchi, Mary Stevens, John Stoddard, Lynn Stoddard, Allison Su, Shawn Sullivan, Thomas Swarr, Carole Tenny, Ellen Thomson, Sandy Tosi, Stephen Ulman, Michael Ungaro, Kathleen Van Der Aue, Paula Waldman, Bob Wall, Kevin Walsh, Louise Washer, Svetlana Wasserman, carol Waxman, Adrian Webber, Joan Wikholm, Mary Wilson, Mary Zitkus, Kim Zolvik, Katherine Dzikiewicz, Marget Goodwin, Deborah Roe.

Marc Gonzalez Program Coordinator Conservation Law Foundation

Marc Gonzalez supports SJ 37 on behalf of Conservation Law Foundation. He notes that the purpose of this legislation is to give the general population standing to sue regardless of

personal economic interests and with the intention to protect the environment. This points to the approaching the standing not through the lens of potential personal enrichment at the cost of the state or others but for the health of community and the land on which they live. Mr. Gonzalez concludes by stating that there are times at which the CEPA or other environmental protection laws fall short and therefore this resolution would act as a way to bridge that gap. Mr. Gonzalez ends his testimony by stating that this resolution is made to benefit all people and so the Conservation Law Foundation supports it.

Sharon Baldwin

Sharon Baldwin noted that they have been tracking the air quality index since summer 24 wildfires and is also worried about pesticides and other runoff from local farms entering the water supply.

5 Anonymous Respondents

The anonymous respondents stated that this resolution would put environmental rights before the people in a referendum and that process is crucial to putting democracy in action. Many also specify that the Federal government is rapidly dismantling environmental protections and the Environmental Protection Agency, establishing these environmental rights and a declaration of rights in the Connecticut state constitution is more important than ever. They argue that the resolution would raise environmental justice to the highest constitutional standing and enforceability, strengthening our existing laws and addressing any gaps or loopholes that result in environmental harm,

Anonymous 38 specifies that they are an environmental educator, and that the health of the environment provides many benefits to the residents as many of the children enjoy their experiences outdoors away from daily life and technology and parents enjoy knowing that their children have a safe environment to explore.

Anonymous 43 states that they moved to Connecticut from another state that had enshrined environmental laws in their constitution and that as a family they enjoyed the outdoors. They stated that this resolution would give them peace of mind as a parent that the outdoor activities they enjoyed are protected so that they may continue to share those experiences with their children.

NATURE AND SOURCES OF OPPOSITION:

Jessica Olander, President of Connecticut River Valley Chamber of Commerce

Jessica Olander states that SJ 37 would give Connecticut residents automatic standing with new rights which would subject businesses to lengthy and costly litigation based on unclear standards that could hinder economic growth. Ms. Olander states that SJ 37 would prohibit funds supporting protection of the state's natural resources from being diverted into other projects and that this could open the door for individuals to bring lawsuits against businesses or the state if they believe an organization is not in full compliance with the environmental policies associated with this vaguely worded amendment. She argues that the uncertainty this amendment would create would cause a chilling effect that would leave them vulnerable to costly litigation that may jeopardize their ability to grow and hire workers. effect on opportunities to attract new businesses to Connecticut or the region.

Christian Herb President of Connecticut Energy Marketers

Mr. Herb opposes SJ 37 on behalf of the Connecticut Energy Marketers Association which represents 600 local and family-owned energy marketers, who employ over 13,000 Connecticut residents. Mr. Herb states that the General Assembly previously passed the Global Warming Solutions Act, which requires biofuel blending. He argues that this allows many companies in the industry to make enough money to make investments necessary to transition to low-emissions fuel but that this resolution would expose this industry to litigation and disrupt this process.

Paul Amarone, Policy Director for Connecticut Business and Industry Association

Paul Amarone echoes the sentiments of the above comments but also specifies that businesses in the state make use of natural resources to conduct everyday operations and therefore the vague language in SJ 37 could cause unintended harm to businesses in the state.

Betsy Gara Executive Director Council of Small Towns

Betsy Gara notes that Pennsylvania is one of a few states that have adopted environmental rights into their constitution and that even though it has been enshrined in law for several years, that resolution has become the subject of many lawsuits challenging state and local laws, permits, and zoning decisions. She states that this raises troubling questions regarding the substantive effect a resolution such as this imposes on the state and its municipalities. Ms. Gara goes on to explain that in New York, the green amendment adopted there triggered a lawsuit challenging the continued operation and maintenance of a highway that has existed for almost 60 years. She states that the state won the suit due to the court stating that the green amendment was not retroactive and therefore could not apply to the highway. Ms. Gara states that this indicates that the courts are still defining the breadth of rights granted to individuals and organizations under the amendment. She states that this results in the full impact of the amendment is uncertainty. She asserts that allowing environmental protections to be defined by the courts on a case-by-case basis will create confusion, leaving municipalities vulnerable to costly legal battles that may jeopardize the approval or completion of critical local projects. She concludes by noting that this would be likely to create a chilling effect that would discourage attracting new businesses.

Elizabeth Gara Executive Director Connecticut Water Works Association

Elizabeth Gara states that water facilities are currently dealing with many challenges with updating aging infrastructure by improving the efficiency of treatment and distribution systems. These facilities are also having to deal with making changes to comply with state and federal requirements such as hardening infrastructure to climate change, identifying and replacing lead service lines, addressing new emerging complaints like PFAS, and modifying dams and distribution systems to make state-mandated streamflow releases. Ms. Gara states that infrastructure investment projects are long term capital intensive in nature and therefore need to be certain of compliance timelines and guidelines to successfully complete projects. She adds that water utilities rely on registered diversions, diversion permits, reservoir impoundments, and other regulated water uses to meet their obligation to provide safe, reliable high quality drinking water to customers. Ms. Gara argues that due to its broad language, this resolution potentially gives individuals the ability to bring lawsuits against state agencies and local business, which jeopardizes public safety by disrupting these ongoing processes and adding pressure to a struggling industry.

Jean Cronin American Petroleum Institute

Opposes SJ 37 because Connecticut has comprehensive environmental laws, policies, and regulatory bodies such as the Department of Energy and Environmental Protection which have statutorily mandated responsibilities. She cites deep as being “responsible for protecting and enhancing the quality of Connecticut’s air, water, and lands ... through environmental monitoring, permitting, enforcement, cleanup of contaminated sites, and pollution prevention strategies.” She continues to say the vague nature of the language leaves the full implications unclear and up to judicial interpretation. Jean Cronin states that this would in effect delegate the power of decision making from the legislative branch to the judicial branch. This creates confusion on the local level because there is no consensus.

Rob Sampson, Connecticut State Senator

Senator Rob Sampson states that this resolution will carry heavy consequences by shifting the power of policy making away from the legislative branch. He argues that the legislature is more balanced in nature than the judiciary because elected representatives’ debate and manage competing priorities in order to remain accountable to voters. He continues by saying this amendment would invite widespread litigation which would open the door to lawsuits against the state, municipalities, businesses, property owners, and neighbors. He notes that any development project, infrastructure improvement, or land-use approval could become the subject of constitutional challenge. He concludes by stating the environment should be protected through thoughtful legislation, regulatory reform, and accountable policymaking.

Linda Dalessio

Linda Dalessio opposes SJ 37 because the language of this resolution makes use of vague language can cause legal uncertainty. In her view this uncertainty will lead to unpredictable legal interpretations. Ms. Dalessio also states that this bill will enshrine within our constitution judicial overreach by establishing constitutional rights that shifts environmental policy making, an elected legislative responsibility to a judiciary responsibility. This could empower courts to override Democratic decision-making on energy, land use, and infrastructure projects. Ms. Dalessio states an amendment like this will also lead to costly lawsuits against state agencies, municipalities, and businesses. This will increase regulatory cost, and discourage investment in the state of Connecticut, which is desperately needed.

Jessica Olander, President of Connecticut River Valley Chamber of Commerce

Jessica Olander states that SJ 37 would give Connecticut residents automatic standing with new rights which would subject businesses to lengthy and costly litigation based on unclear standards that could hinder economic growth. Ms. Olander states that SJ 37 would prohibit funds supporting protection of the state's natural resources from being diverted into other projects and that this could open the door for individuals to bring lawsuits against businesses or the state if they believe an organization is not in full compliance with the environmental policies associated with this vaguely worded amendment. She argues that the uncertainty this amendment would create would cause a chilling effect that would leave them vulnerable to costly litigation that may jeopardize their ability to grow and hire workers. effect on opportunities to attract new businesses to Connecticut or the region.

Mona Colwell

Mona Colwell states that any changes to the law should take place in legislation and not constitutional amendments.

Michele May

Michele May states that this resolution would embolden activist groups to bring lawsuits that could alter private property rights, local land-use decisions, and individual sovereignty. Ms. May notes that in her opinion, true conservation thrives under local control and personal responsibility, not constitutional mandates.

Charels Baugh

Charles Baugh opposes SJ 37 and states that this legislation will increase litigation, consumer cost, and would in nature replace the legislative process by forcing the courts to make decisions about energy policy.

Alton Blodgett

Alton Blodgett noted that in any action taken on climate change should occur in legislation not in a constitutional amendment.

Jerry Cincotta

Jerry Cincotta believes the science indicating climate change is not settled and without a clear consensus on the data, including that concept in a constitutional amendment will result in unintended consequences.

Janet Dahlberg

Janet Dahlberg states that she opposes SJ 37 because this resolution would take away the public's ability to give their input on environmental decisions.

Stephen Sack

Mr. Sack states this bill will only harm the state and the residents of Connecticut by costing taxpayers billions of dollars in lawsuit payouts.

Marcella Kurowski

Ms. Kurowski states that this resolution would lead to impetuous litigation.

4 Anonymous Respondents

Most of the anonymous respondents opposed SJ 37 because they believed it added an unnecessary layer of expense and bureaucracy and the thought that the resources allocated to this bill would be better spent on fixing the affordability in the state. They also stated that they view this legislation as government overreach, and they prefer the legislature take environmental issues case by case. Lastly many stated the real-world consequences included endless litigation, increased consumer costs, and replacing legislative decision-making based on representation with the courts deciding the states energy policy.

Reported by: Ass. Clerk Geva Tinker

Date: April 7, 2026