



*The Voice of the Merrimack*

***Via Electronic Mail***

The Honorable John J. Cronin, Chair  
Senate Committee on Municipalities and Regional Government  
24 Beacon Street, Room 504  
Boston, MA 02133

The Honorable Lori A. Ehrlich, House Chair  
House Committee on Municipalities and Regional Government  
24 Beacon Street, Room 504  
Boston, MA 02133

***RE: Testimony in support of H.2198, An Act Relative to the Protection of Wetlands and Water Resources in Chapter 40B Applications***

Dear Chair Cronin, Chair Ehrlich, and Members of the Joint Committee on Municipalities and Regional Government:

Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony in support of H.2198, An Act Relative to the Protection of Wetlands and Water Resources in Chapter 40B Applications, on behalf of the Merrimack River Watershed Council (MRWC).

The Merrimack River Watershed Council has been advocating for the Merrimack and its watershed for over 40 years. The Merrimack is the source of drinking water for over 600,000 residents, and it is vital that we do everything we can to keep our river clean.

For too long, developers have underestimated the extreme importance of wetlands to the health of local waterways. H2198 changes that. This bill closes an important loophole that currently allows some developers to bypass critical wetlands protections. Wetlands and wetland buffer zones enhance flood storage capacity, protect water quality, sequester carbon, and help minimize impacts from severe storms. Green spaces and vegetated buffers adjacent to wetlands and waterways allow for the recharge of stormwater into the ground, minimize heat island effects, protect drinking water supplies, and provide areas for outdoor recreation and habitat. We can't allow building – especially building that is only 25% affordable – to destroy wetlands, the “lungs” of our rivers and streams.

While affordable housing is necessary, so is clean, drinkable water. We continue to support programs that facilitate development of affordable homes when appropriately sited. Unfortunately, affordable housing developed in wetlands, within floodplains, or in areas with

poor drainage or high groundwater could have the unintended consequence of exposing residents to elevated risks of flooding and poor water quality. These problems are exacerbated by climate change. For decades, Environmental Justice communities have suffered disproportionately from poor land use practices, and those inequities should not be further perpetuated by overriding local wetlands protections.

We respectfully ask the Joint Committee on Municipalities and Regional Government to provide a favorable report on H.2198, *An Act Relative to the Protection of Wetlands and Water Resources in Chapter 40B Applications*. Thank you for your consideration of this matter.

Sincerely,



Matthew Thorne  
Executive Director



Christina Eckert  
MRWC Board