

# Sierra Club Connecticut Recap of 2021 Legislative Session

## VICTORIES

### Budget

[The state budget](#) approved by the legislature includes new funding for decarbonization of buildings. The new funding includes \$7 million to support remediation of health and safety issues that are found in up to 30% of low income housing during energy efficiency audits, and prevent the residents from fully accessing energy efficiency services. The barriers include asbestos, mold, mildew, knob-and-tube electrical wiring, and pests, which are barriers to full weatherization and lowered energy bills; and another \$7 million to support the comprehensive building retrofit grant program for affordable and low income housing created by Senate Bill 356 and described below.

### Climate & Just Transition

[Senate Bill 356](#), championed by State Senator Rick Lopes, co-chair of the legislature's Housing Committee, establishes for the first time a comprehensive building retrofit grant program for affordable and low income housing. We expect the program to result in lowered energy expenses, lower energy demands on our grid, lowered pollution, and lowered carbon emissions. The program provides access to an array of measures including energy efficiency and weatherization, installation of rooftop solar, electric vehicle charging infrastructure, heat pumps and balanced ventilation, and the mitigation of health and safety hazards including, but not limited to, gas leaks, mold, vermiculite, asbestos, lead and radon. Priority goes to applicants who a) use local contractors who pay the prevailing wage and who make good faith efforts to hire minority business enterprises, and b) upgrade affordable housing units for households that include an individual who qualifies for utility financial hardship programs or other means-tested assistance. We worked with allies from CT Renewables including Connecticut Citizen Action Group, Efficiency for All, Operation Fuel, Center for Advocacy & Justice, CT Green Building Council and others to get this exciting program through the legislature.

[Senate Bill 999](#) helps to establish a just transition to clean energy by guaranteeing good, local jobs and training programs for large solar projects. The bill will require all contractors and subcontractors on renewable energy projects of 2 megawatts or larger to pay construction workers and operations, maintenance and security employees working on site at least the prevailing wage and fringe benefits – unless the project is covered by a project labor agreement. The bill also requires the contractors to “take all necessary actions” to establish a workforce development program to train new workers for higher-paid roles, and to ensure contractors participate in apprenticeship programs. In 2019, similar provisions were established for offshore wind procurement. This legislation was led by the Connecticut Roundtable on Climate and Jobs and supported by Sierra Club Connecticut.

[Senate Bill 952](#) sets a goal of 1,000 MW of energy storage by 2030 and gives DEEP procurement authority. Energy storage is important to achieving 100% clean and renewable electricity by helping to integrate renewable energy, such as wind and solar, effectively and reliably. Under the bill PURA is charged with program and rate design.

[HB 6441](#) expands the climate change adaptation tools for towns to address issues like stormwater property destruction and pollution.

[HB 5429](#) simultaneously tackles safety and greenhouse gases by making our communities more walkable, bikeable and transit-friendly. The measures to improve safety for pedestrians and bikers include pedestrian right-of-way at crosswalks, new “dooring” protections, and municipal speed limits; the bill also increases access to pedestrian and bike pathways.

### **Waste Reduction**

[Senate Bill 1037](#) updates and modernizes Connecticut’s bottle redemption law aka the Bottle Bill. It was amended on the floor of the Senate from the bill approved by the Environmental Committee, but still will help reduce waste through several key elements including a 10 cent deposit starting in 2024, an increase in the handling fee for redemption centers to 3.5 cents, and expands to some non-carbonated beverages including hard seltzers and ciders, juice, sports and energy drinks, and teas. Sierra Club’s concern about the amendment is Section 9 which creates an organization of beverage industry stakeholders to facilitate future changes to the container deposit program. Working with our allies, we intend to ensure strong oversight of the provisions in Section 9. Sierra Club Connecticut and others co-signed a follow-up letter outlining our concerns. In addition to the bottle redemption law, the bill also requires the DEEP commissioner to develop an incentive program to help municipalities that want to adopt a unit-based pricing program for solid waste disposal. Thanks to volunteer Amy Harrell for leading on this bill for Sierra Club Connecticut, and for the years-long Bottle Bill coalition leader, Citizens Campaign for the Environment.

[House Bill 6503](#) broadens Connecticut’s composting law by requiring commercial food wholesalers or distributors, industrial food manufacturers or processors, supermarkets, resorts, or conference centers generating an annual average projected volume of 26 tons or more of source-separated organic materials (down from 52) and within 20 miles of a composting facility to separate organic materials. It also makes changes to anaerobic digesters located on farms including increasing the cap on food scraps, food processing residuals, and soiled or unrecycled paper that can be used as feed stock from 5% to 40%. At least 50% of feed stock must come from farm generated organic waste from an animal feeding operation.

[Senate Bill 928](#) requires the Department of Energy and Environmental Protection commissioner to submit recommendations for recycled content requirements for products sold in Connecticut to the governor and the Environment Committee by December 1, 2022.

### **Toxics**

[Senate Bill 837](#) will ban PFAS chemicals from firefighting foam used for training; institute a takeback program for foam currently held by fire departments; and restrict this class of chemicals in food packaging sold or distributed within the state. Thanks to the

leadership of Clean Water Action, to Chapter Chair Susan Eastwood for leading on this bill for Sierra Club Connecticut, and for the advocacy of Connecticut high schoolers led by volunteer Keira Sullivan.

### **Wildlife and Habitat**

[Senate Bill 925](#) protects the big six African species - African elephants, giraffes, lions, leopards, black rhinoceros, white rhinoceros - from trophy hunting and poaching. The bill bans importing, possessing, selling, offering for sale, or transporting in Connecticut a specimen (dead or alive) of any of six types of African animals. The final bill specified some exemptions including federal law and federal permits. Connecticut now joins other states including California, Hawaii, New Jersey, New York and Washington that have passed similar laws to protect these animals. The Wildlife Committee will continue to work to ensure protection for these iconic species. Many thanks for volunteer Kathleen Magner for leading on this bill for Sierra Club Connecticut and for the advocacy of the Wildlife Committee.

[HJ 53](#) authorizes the adoption of the Long Island Blue Plan, a resource that provides guidance and a collaborative vision for the future of Long Island Sound; it identifies and protects Significant Human Use Area and Ecologically Significant areas.

### **Voting Rights**

In a fight led by Common Cause and supported by Sierra Club Connecticut, two notable voting resolutions passed the Connecticut legislature this session.

[HJ 58](#) proposes a constitutional amendment to remove the constitution's current restrictions on absentee voting. It did not pass by the required  $\frac{3}{4}$  vote in the House to appear on the ballot in 2022; it will be referred to the 2023 session of the legislature where, if it passes by a majority of each house, it will appear on the 2024 ballot. If a majority of those voting on the amendment in the general election approves it, the amendment will become part of the state constitution.

[HJ 59](#) proposes a constitutional amendment to authorize the General Assembly to provide by law for in-person, early voting before an election or referendum. It will appear on the 2022 ballot where if a majority of those voting on the amendment in the general election approves it, the amendment will become part of the state constitution.

### **Equity and Inclusion:**

[House Bill 6107](#) legalizes accessory dwelling units, caps excessive parking requirements, develops a model form-based code, defines character by physical standards, mandates training for land use commissioners, clarifies technical standards, defines "as-of-right," eliminates unreasonable application fees, and requires towns to affirmatively further fair housing and address housing disparities. Desegregate CT led the coalition of which Sierra Club Connecticut is a part.

## LOSSES

[Senate Bill 718](#) was introduced by Senator Christine Cohen early in the session and would have placed a moratorium on the construction of new fossil fuel power plants. 21 legislators joined her to co-sponsor the bill, but it was referred to the Energy & Technology Committee where it died without even a public hearing. We thank Senate Cohen and the legislative co-sponsors for trying to address the issues of new fossil fuel infrastructure in our state, and hope to work with them again next year to move this proposal forward. We cannot meet our climate and clean energy goals if we keep building fossil fuel power plants in Connecticut.

[Senate Bill 882](#) would have required 100% zero-carbon electricity supply by 2040 among other components of the bill. Sierra Club advocated to include 100% zero-carbon electricity generation in addition to supply, but did not secure that change. However, an amendment was offered to require DEEP to consider Connecticut's Global Warming Solutions Act when issuing permits, a step advocated for by Sierra Club. DEEP raised concerns about the amendment, and the bill was never called for a vote in the Senate.

[House Bill 6551](#) would have significantly strengthened Connecticut protections for environmental justice communities by authorizing DEEP to reject permits that could cause or contribute to adverse cumulative environmental or public health stressors and creating an environmental justice advisory council. The bill also created environmental standards for data centers. Protecting vulnerable communities is a top concern for Sierra Club CT, and this bill was modeled after the environmental justice law passed in New Jersey last year.

[Senate Bill 931](#) would have promoted zero-emission trucks for Connecticut by allowing DEEP to consider and adopt emissions standards for medium and heavy duty vehicles. The Senate passed and amended the bill to add triggering language requiring that 5 other states including one in the northeast adopt the standard before it is implemented in Connecticut. See fact sheet on the bill [here](#), and [letter of support](#). The bill was not called in the House despite strong bipartisan support in the Senate.

[Senate Bill 1047](#) would have established nationally significant requirements on insurance companies to report on their climate risk including fossil fuel investments and underwriting. It was approved with strong bipartisan support by the Insurance Committee, but did not advance in the Senate.

[House Bill 6524](#) - This bill would increase and expand the use of fracked gas by procuring 30 MW of fuel cells. Fuel cells, unless designated renewable, are not clean energy and are not in alignment with the goal of 100% zero-carbon electricity established in EO3. It was approved by the legislature.

[House Bill 6527](#) will increase subsidies for Class III sources of electricity, in direct contradiction with the direction that our state climate and clean energy policy says we

need to go. Class III sources are not zero-carbon. Ratepayers will now be subsidizing more Class III energy at a time when the state has a goal of 100% zero-carbon electricity by 2040. It was approved by the legislature.

[For a full list of bills Sierra Club was tracking, see here.](#)