March 3, 2025

TESTIMONY OF
KEITH CAGLE, PRESIDENT
FRIENDS OF CONNECTICUT SPORTSMEN
ON
HB 6248 *AN ACT ESTABLISHING A MORATORIUM ON FISHING FOR STRIPED BASS IN THE LOWER HOUSATONIC RIVER and*
HB 6250 AN ACT CONCERNING THE LEVELS OF STAFFING FOR ENVIRONMENTAL CONSERVATION OFFICERS

Co-Chairs Lopes and Parker, Ranking Members Harding and Callahan and Members of the Environment Committee:

My name is Keith Cagle and I am President of Friends of Connecticut Sportsmen, a nonprofit 501(c)(4) advocating for the preservation of hunting, fishing, trapping and recreational shooting for current and future generations of Connecticut residents. I am here today to testify in opposition to House Bill 6248 *AN ACT ESTABLISHING A MORATORIUM ON FISHING FOR STRIPED BASS IN THE LOWER HOUSATONIC RIVER* and in support of HB 6250 *AN ACT CONCERNING THE LEVELS OF STAFFING FOR ENVIRONMENTAL CONSERVATION OFFICERS.*

Friends of Connecticut Sportsmen echoes the testimony of the Fisheries Advisory Council (FAC), expressing our shared concern about the health and sustainability of the striped bass population in Connecticut. A moratorium on the Housatonic River will not enhance the overall striped bass population. What this moratorium will do is penalize local law-abiding anglers who also happen to be the strongest proponents of meaningful conservation of striped bass.

We are aware of the emergence of illegal commercial fishing in the past two years that has been well documented and effectively addressed by our dedicated ENCON police to the best of their ability. Over the course of the spike in illegal fishing, many fines have been issued, yet the activity continues. Greater deterrence is needed. The current penalty is not enough to outweigh the value of the catches, making the illegal activity still within the risk/reward benefit for the perpetrators. That can and should change. Friends of Connecticut Sportsmen respectfully requests that the good intentions of this bill be realigned to give our dedicated ENCON officers the tools they need to deter illegal fishing of striped bass. We concur with our friends at FAC, that the Committee first try doubling the current fine from $75 to $150 to better deter unlawful fishing before limiting access by lawful anglers.

Friends of Connecticut Sportsmen would like to offer its unequivocal support for HB 6248 to ensure a process is in place to continually review the staffing levels of our valued ENCON officers against the current and enhanced duties, as well as new challenges that come up in their efforts to keep our state residents, wildlife and natural resources protected.

Thank you.