

CONNECTICUT
Land Conservation Council

Testimony on HB 7347
Environment Committee
Submitted by Amy Blaymore Paterson, Esq., Executive Director
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Co-Chairs Cohen and Demicco, Vice-Chairs Gresko and Kushner, Ranking Members Harding and Miner, and Members of the Environment Committee:

Thank you for this opportunity to present testimony on behalf of the Connecticut Land Conservation Council (CLCC) in opposition to **HB 7347: An Act Exempting Senior Citizens And Veterans From The Passport To The Parks Motor Vehicle Registration Fee.**

As the State's umbrella organization for the land conservation community, including its 137+ land trusts, CLCC advocates for land conservation, stewardship, and funding, and works to ensure the long-term strength and viability of the land conservation community in Connecticut.

Enacted in late 2017, the Passport to the Parks program generates dedicated revenues to support the operation and maintenance of Connecticut State Parks, Forests and Wildlife Management Areas. Supported through a \$10 biennial fee that is applied through the Connecticut Department of Motor Vehicles to registration of non-commercial vehicles, the Passport program provides Connecticut residents access to all State Parks for free, while helping to restore and support park services such as campgrounds, lifeguards and hours of operation at certain parks and nature centers.

One of the state's top tourism destinations, Connecticut State Parks are worth the investment -- attracting approximately 9 million visitors every year; generating over \$1 billion annually for the state's economy; and supporting over 9,000 private sector jobs.

While sensitive to the nature of the request, CLCC is concerned that carving out an exemption from the fee for certain categories of users, will lead to a "slippery slope" of requests from others, thereby undermining the efficacy of the program. At a time when the state is seeking alternative solutions to address budget shortfalls, we respectfully urge the Committee to leave the fee structure for this dedicated source of revenue intact.

On behalf of the Connecticut Land Conservation Council, I thank you for this opportunity to provide our comments. We would be happy to answer any questions you may have.

