

CONNECTICUT Land Conservation Council

Testimony on House Bill No. 7408 (Section 6)
Finance, Revenue and Bonding Committee
Submitted by Amy Blaymore Paterson, Esq., Executive Director
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Co-Chairs Fonfara and Rojas and members of the Finance, Revenue and Bonding Committee:

Thank you for this opportunity to present testimony on behalf of the Connecticut Land Conservation Council in **strong opposition** to **Section 6 of HB 7408, An Act Concerning Municipal Revenue and Stormwater Authority, Studies of the Pilot Grants Program and a Property Tax Exemption for Machinery and Equipment, and Enterprise Zones**. Section 6 of the bill would allow municipalities to require nonprofits to pay a “public safety and infrastructure charge” for police, fire, emergency services, and road maintenance (“**the proposal**”).

The Connecticut Land Conservation Council (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. CLCC’s concerns with the proposal relate both specifically to its impacts on land trusts, as well as generally to the arbitrary and unfair nature of the language of the bill.

HB 7408 Section 6 could have dire financial consequences for Connecticut’s land trusts and other nonprofit land conservation organizations.

There are approximately 137 land trusts in Connecticut, the third most per state in the country; together they have protected over 190,000 acres. Connecticut’s land trusts vary in size, service area, number of members, number of volunteers, and capacity; some are staffed, but most are all-volunteer. Across the board, they operate on severely limited budgets, sustained by private donations, fundraising events, and grants. Most critically, what distinguishes land trusts from other nonprofits is the fact that they are created for the purpose of upholding their mission *in perpetuity* -- beyond our lifetime and for the benefit of generations to come.

The benefits of protected land are well documented - among them are ensuring clean drinking water, allowing healthy and accessible local food, providing places for people to recreate, and mitigating the impacts of climate change. Land trusts acquire and manage land, protect natural resources, and provide opportunities to connect with special places that would otherwise be inaccessible to the public.

These services benefit the town’s quality of life and economy by increasing property values, attracting visitors, and (ironically) avoiding the need for infrastructure and other costly municipal services



associated with developed land. Land trusts protect the places that define their communities, making Connecticut an attractive place to live and work.¹

The added financial burden of this proposal would divert essential resources away from land trusts, and threaten their ability to provide these critical services for the benefit of the public and future generations.

The specific language of HB 7408 Section 6 is vague, ambiguous, and arbitrary in nature.

Section 6 applies to all nonprofits, failing to distinguish between the different types of tax-exempt organizations and the nature of their services. As many land trusts have pointed out in their respective testimony, not only do they rarely, if ever, use municipal services, but by conserving land they are actually avoiding the need and associated costs for infrastructure and other services that would otherwise be required if the land were developed.

The language in subsection (b) is ambiguous and allows the town unfettered discretion in calculating the fee charged to the land trust. This opens the door to an unfair and arbitrary application of the fee on land trusts and any other nonprofits with property located in the municipality.

Land trusts are recognized as nonprofits existing for the benefit of the public. For this reason, they are exempt from property, income and sales tax and able to accept tax deductible donations from individuals and corporations. This has been the law for decades.

On behalf of Connecticut's land trusts, we urge you to remove Section 6 from HB 7408 and vote no to any proposal that will undermine their ability to carry out their vital mission for the benefit of generations to come.

Thank you for this opportunity to provide our comments. I would be happy to answer any questions you may have.

¹ One of the newest studies to document the economic benefits of land conservation is [Assessing the Local Economic Impacts of Land Protection](https://doi.org/10.1111/cobi.13318), Katharine R.E. Sims, et. al., Harvard Forest, <https://doi.org/10.1111/cobi.13318>