

CONNECTICUT Land Conservation Council

Testimony on Proposed House Bill No. 5216
Transportation Committee
Submitted by Amy Blaymore Paterson, Esq., Executive Director
Connecticut Land Conservation Council
January 30, 2017

Chairman Guerrero, Co-Chairs Leone and Boucher, and Members of the Transportation Committee:

Thank you for this opportunity to present testimony on behalf of the Connecticut Land Conservation Council (CLCC) in support of **Proposed House Bill No. 5216 (HB 5216), An Act Concerning the Issuance of a Number Plate to Commemorate State Parks**. We thank the Transportation Committee and Representative Carpino for raising this bill in support of our State Parks.

As the state's umbrella organization for the land conservation community, including its 137+/- land trusts, 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 is committed to supporting the Department of Energy and Environmental Protection (DEEP) natural resources programs to ensure the proper stewardship, management and inventorying of state conservation lands. We are therefore extremely concerned that further cuts to the agency's already bare-boned budget would render the State Parks system unsustainable.

In addition to providing the public with opportunities to recreate and enjoy our state's natural resources, Connecticut State Parks are economic drivers. They are investments worth protecting -- attracting 8 million annual visitors and generating over \$1 billion and 9,000 jobs for the state each year. For every \$1 spent on the State Parks, over \$38 is returned to Connecticut.

Yet, despite these economic benefits, our State Park system is chronically underfunded and now ranks 49th in the country in the percentage of the overall state budget that they receive. Connecticut is also one of only two states in the country that funds its State Parks exclusively through the General Fund (the other is Rhode Island).

CLCC strongly supports establishing creative mechanisms, such as a commemorative license plate, to enable funds to be dedicated for the purpose of supporting the operation and maintenance of our State Parks. We further contend that such funds be placed in a dedicated, non-lapsing account to assure they are in fact used for those intended purposes.

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 and/or provide additional information about the wonderful conservation work undertaken every day by our state's land trust community.

