

CONNECTICUT  
Land Conservation Council

Testimony

Senate Bill No. 943, House Bill Nos. 5415 and 6122, and House Joint Resolution 99

Environment Committee

Submitted by Amy Blaymore Paterson, Esq., Executive Director

Connecticut Land Conservation Council

March 6, 2017

Senator Kennedy, Senator Miner, Representative Demicco and Members of the Environment Committee:

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. Thank you for this opportunity to present testimony regarding the following Committee bills: **SB 943**: AAC THE INSTALLATION OF CERTAIN SOLAR FACILITIES ON PRODUCTIVE FARMLANDS (Support); **HB 5415**: AA REQUIRING DEEP TO PREPARE A PLAN FOR THE RAPID DETECTION AND ERADICATION OF NEWLY DISCOVERED TERRESTRIAL INVASIVE SPECIES (Support); **HB 6122**: AAC THE VALUATION AND TAXATION OF FARMLAND (Oppose); and **HJ 99**: RESOLUTION PROPOSING AN AMENDMENT TO THE STATE CONSTITUTION TO PROTECT THE FUNDING OF PROGRAMS THROUGH THE CIA (Support).

**CLCC supports SB 943: AAC the Installation of Certain Solar Facilities on Productive Farmlands**

CLCC supports continued efforts to address the very important goal of balancing land conservation efforts with renewable energy production, both of which are essential for a clean, healthy and sustainable environment. We thank the Committee for its leadership in continuing to move this dialogue forward by raising SB 943, which, *inter alia*, seeks to prioritize and incentivize the siting of utility-scale solar energy facilities on sites that avoid development of farmland and forest land. With respect to the technical details of the bill, including (1) the process and criteria for review of proposals to site utility-scale solar energy facilities, (2) whether to expand its application to other natural resources, and (3) whether and how to define farmland and forest land, we respectfully request that the Committee consider the recommendations of the Council on Environmental Quality in addressing current deficiencies in state laws and policies in order to better incentivize the siting of these facilities on alternative sites.

**CLCC supports HB 5415: AA Requiring DEEP to Prepare a Plan for Rapid Detection and Eradication of Newly Discovered Terrestrial Invasive Species**

While recognizing the fact that without additional staff, DEEP likely does not have the capacity to implement this bill, we support the Committee's efforts to pursue a coordinated framework to minimize the establishment and spread of new invasive species. As we have discussed with Representative Ziobron, as well as with Representatives Harding and Arconti, CLCC welcomes the opportunity to continue this dialogue with DEEP and assist the members of the Environment Committee in exploring alternative ideas to combat the very serious problem of invasive species control and management that impacts our state's land, water and other natural resources.



**CLCC opposes HB 6122: AA Concerning the Valuation and Taxation of Farmland**

Public Act 490, Connecticut's Land Use Value Assessment Law for Farm Land, Forest Land and Open Space Land, was enacted to help incentivize the preservation of private farm, forest and open space lands in the state. While we acknowledge the concern expressed by Representative Ackert that some may be using the law as a way to avoid paying taxes while they develop property, CLCC is concerned that the proposed change to the bill is overly broad and will lead to unintended consequences. As written, if a farmer purchases land that qualifies in all respects as farmland pursuant to PA490, under HB6122 they would be precluded from participating in the program if the property also happens to be an approved building lot. CLCC contends that in order to maximize the law's intended purpose of helping to preserve land, the valuation and taxation of farmland for purposes of PA490 should continue to be based on the property's current use and not on its potential use. We would be happy to work with Representative Ackert to explore other ideas to address the concerns he has outlined in his testimony.

**CLCC supports HJ99: Resolution Proposing an Amendment to the State Constitution to Protect the Funding of Programs through the CIA**

Protecting the level and integrity of the Community Investment Act is an annual priority for CLCC. The CIA was established as a dedicated revenue source outside of the budget to provide increased and consistent funding for reinvestment into our communities for open space, farmland/dairy support, historic properties, and affordable housing programs. Funded by a surcharge on recording fees, the CIA has benefited the economic well-being and overall quality of life in virtually every town in Connecticut. However, in recent years, the CIA has continually been the target of diversions and cuts, threatening the efficacy and sustainability of the program. CLCC is appreciative and supportive of the Committee's efforts to pursue mechanisms, including a constitutional amendment, to best protect the long term viability of the program.

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.