

CONNECTICUT
Land Conservation Council

Testimony on House Bill No. 5228

Environment Committee

Submitted by Amy Blaymore Paterson, Executive Director

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Co-Chairs Lopes and Gresko, Vice-Chairs Hochadel and Palm, Ranking Members Harding and Callahan, and members of the Environment Committee:

The Connecticut Land Conservation Council (CLCC) is the state's umbrella organization for the land conservation community, including its ~120 land trusts. CLCC is a 501(c)(3) organization operating statewide. Our mission is to elevate and strengthen land conservation in Connecticut.

Thank you for this opportunity to present testimony in strong support of **House Bill No. 5228, An Act Concerning The Purchase Of Certain Lands At Agricultural Value**. HB 5228 addresses two significant barriers to agriculture in Connecticut:

Access to affordable land is fundamental for individuals seeking to enter farming or expand their operations. However, the current market dynamics often price out aspiring farmers, particularly those who are new, beginning, and/or Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC), making it increasingly difficult for them to pursue their agricultural ambitions. Protected farmland, even land subject to an agricultural easement under the state's Farmland Protection Program, is not necessarily preserved *in perpetuity* for agricultural purposes, leaving it at risk of acquisition by individuals with no genuine interest in farming.

An Option to Purchase at Agricultural Value (OPAV) addresses both issues. OPAV is a voluntary legal agreement that restricts the sale of land to only certain farmers or family members ("qualified farmers") and limits the sale price to agricultural value (versus the higher fair market value). This decreased value can make land with an OPAV more affordable for qualified farmers who want to purchase the land for agricultural purposes. An OPAV is placed on the land at the time of conveyance to a land trust or government agency. OPAVs may be used with or can be part of an agricultural easement. For properties already subject to an easement, an OPAV can be added later.

OPAV is an important conservation tool that helps farmers generate revenue, make their land affordable for future farmers, and ensure their land stays in agriculture. We urge the Committee to approve HB 5228.

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

