

# CONNECTICUT Land Conservation Council

Testimony on Senate Bill No. 11  
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. CLCC envisions a future where every Connecticut community is supported and sustained by a diverse mix of conserved land, and land conservation is embraced as an essential community value.*

Thank you for this opportunity to present testimony in strong support of **Senate Bill No. 11, An Act Coordinating Connecticut Resiliency Planning And Broadening Municipal Options For Climate Resilience**.

I represented CLCC and the land conservation community as a member of the Governor's Council on Climate Change (GC3) Forests Sub-Group and Resilient Infrastructure and Nature-based Solutions Working Group, and the Policy on Resilient Forests for Connecticut's Future (PRFCT Future) Working Group. I chair the state Natural Heritage, Open Space and Watershed Land Acquisition Review Board, which provides oversight and input into the state's land conservation programs, policies, and planning.

In all capacities, CLCC's goal is to safeguard our natural and working lands, prioritize the vital role of nature-based solutions in mitigating the escalating effects of the inter-related crises of climate change and biodiversity loss, and ensure that everyone everywhere has access to the benefits of nature. It is through this lens CLCC offers the following testimony concerning SB 11.

SB 11 will implement the Governor's budget recommendation to allocate \$5.75 million to the Office of Policy and Management to prepare for and adapt to changing climate conditions. Many sections in SB 11 advance the GC3 Phase I Report recommendations and others proposed by the GC3 Financing and Funding Adaptation and Resilience Working Group and various Working and Natural Lands Working Group subgroups.

While we strongly support SB 11 in its entirety, there are certain sections that we would like to highlight in the context of CLCC's land conservation mission and vision:

**Prioritizing Nature-based Solutions and Environmental Justice (Section 10):** CLCC is pleased to see a requirement that within a resiliency improvement district, as detailed in Sections 1-9, priority consideration be given to infrastructure projects that utilize nonstructural and nature-based solutions



intended to restore, maintain or enhance ecosystem services and processes that maintain or improve on environmental quality in or adjacent to the district.

Forestlands and trees, wetlands, healthy organic soils, riparian buffers, and other natural ecosystems are among our most potent defenses against the impacts of climate change. The myriad benefits of these nature-based solutions to public health, the economy, and the environment include reducing the risks and effects of flooding, filtering pollutants from the air, and absorbing and storing carbon. These same ecosystems are also critical to protecting biodiversity. We hope that the prioritization of nature-based solutions is further elevated through this bill and other legislation as part of the state's multi-faceted approach to addressing the climate and biodiversity crises.

Section 10 also mandates that projects within a resiliency improvement district address the needs of environmental justice and other vulnerable communities, as defined in Connecticut General Statutes. The state's climate response and preparedness must incentivize programs and projects that protect its natural environment, public health, and economic well-being, particularly as they impact underserved and vulnerable communities disproportionately affected by climate change and other environmental and health hazards.

**Integrating Climate Change into State, Regional, and Local Planning:** SB11 aims to elevate consideration of climate change in local plans of conservation and development (POCD), enhance local zoning regulations to mitigate its impacts, and update the state POCD statute to integrate climate change considerations into planning. (Sections 11, 12, 22 and 25.) Tools and strategies include climate change vulnerability assessments, increases in local zoning regulatory authority, the expanded use of transfer of development rights (TDR) programs, and more. SB 11 (Sections 32-34) also requires updates to the State Water Plan and regulations to account for climate change. This proactive approach to water planning is essential for ensuring water security in changing climate conditions.

**Increased Accessibility to Land Conservation and Urban Greenspace Funding:** Established in 1998 and administered by DEEP, the Open Space and Watershed Land Acquisition Grant Program (OSWA) provides financial assistance to municipalities, land trusts, and water companies for open space and watershed land conservation projects. OSWA has invested \$141+ million to protect 40,000+ acres through more than 610+ land conservation partner projects. OSWA includes the Urban Green and Community Garden Grant Program (UGCG), which has invested over \$2.5 million in financial assistance to targeted investment and/or distressed municipalities for community garden and greenspace development projects.

While participation in OSWA and UGCG grant programs has been robust, and demand for funding continues to be strong, many land trusts and municipalities in the state still want and need to take advantage of the programs. Sections 27-31 set forth changes to both programs that will remove barriers to participation, including:

- Adding environmental justice communities to the UGCG eligibility. This expansion will more than double the number of municipalities eligible to benefit from this program.
- Expanding UGCG applicant eligibility to non-profits.
- Establishing reimbursement for due diligence expenses (e.g., appraisals, surveys, environmental assessments, etc.) related to OSWA-funded projects.
- Adding two seats representing environmental justice communities to the Natural Heritage, Open Space and Watershed Land Acquisition Review Board (“Review Board”).
- Increasing the maximum OSWA award amount for projects in environmental justice communities to 75% of the property's fair market value.

Developed in consultation with the Review Board and DEEP’s Land Acquisition and Management Office, the statutory revisions proposed in Sections 27-31 will help to incentivize more land trusts and municipalities to participate in OSWA, resulting in increased land conservation and urban greenspace development and access across the state.

In conclusion, we strongly urge the Committee to approve SB 11, which provides new tools, strengthens existing programs and policies, and fosters increased local, regional, and state coordination to help prepare for and respond to short and long-term impacts of the changing climate, which are growing in severity across all landscapes.

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.