

# CONNECTICUT Land Conservation Council

Testimony on Senate Bill No. 1146 Sections 10 and 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 ~130 land trusts. We advocate for land conservation, stewardship and funding, and work to ensure the long-term strength and viability of Connecticut's land conservation community. I also have the honor of serving as Co-Chair of the State Natural Heritage, Open Space and Watershed Land Acquisition Review Board (Open Space Review Board) which provides oversight of DEEP's open space funding programs.*

Thank you for this opportunity to present testimony regarding **Sections 10 and 11 of Senate Bill No. 1146, An Act Concerning the Revisions to Various Programs of the Department of Energy and Environmental Protection**. CLCC's testimony is limited to Sections 10 and 11 of the bill, which we strongly support.

Sections 10 and 11 of SB 1146 would amend sections of the Open Space and Watershed Land Acquisition Grant (OSWA) statute (Connecticut General Statutes Section 7-131d to 7-131k, inclusive) to provide clarity on how a land trust may combine OSWA state grants with federal, municipal, and/or private match funding. The goal of this technical correction is to add efficiencies to the OSWA closing process, and ensure land trusts and other eligible OSWA applicants can utilize multiple funding sources.

Established in 1998 and administered by DEEP, OSWA provides financial assistance to municipalities, land trusts, and water companies for open space and watershed land conservation projects. OSWA has invested \$137+ million to protect 38,000+ acres through more than 600 land conservation partner projects. OSWA includes the Urban Green and Community Garden Program, which has invested over \$1 million in financial assistance to targeted investment and/or distressed municipalities for community garden and greenspace development projects.

Maximum OSWA funding cannot exceed 65% of the fair market value of a property (up to 75% for projects in distressed and/or targeted investment communities). The grant applicant must raise the balance of the purchase price through matching dollars from municipal, federal, and/or private funding sources. Since the program's inception, OSWA has leveraged millions in match dollars to support community conservation projects across the state.

In addition to an OSWA conservation easement in favor of the state, applicants are often required to also record a separate conservation easement in favor of the entity providing the match funding for a project. Questions regarding the timing and order of the recording of the respective easements have been dealt with



on a case-by-case basis, often raising questions regarding eligibility for the OSWA grant and slowing down the closing process for a project.

Developed in consultation with the Review Board, DEEP's Land and Acquisition Management Office, and the Attorney General's office, the technical revisions to Sections 10 and 11 of Senate Bill No. 1146 would address this issue by providing clarity on how an OSWA applicant may effectively combine OSWA grants with federal, municipal, and private match funding to purchase open space or conservation easements, including guidelines for the timing and order of the recording of OSWA and other required easements.

These revisions will help OSWA applicants more efficiently leverage match funding, expedite the closing process when combining OSWA state grants with other non-state funding sources, and consequently allow for increased land conservation across the state.

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.