

CONNECTICUT Land Conservation Council

Testimony Senate Bill No. 129
Planning and Development Committee
Submitted by Amy Blaymore Paterson, Executive Director
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Co-Chairs Cassano and McCarthy Vahey, Vice-Chairs Needleman and Goupil, Ranking Members Hwang and Zullo, and members of the Planning and Development Committee:

The Connecticut Land Conservation Council (CLCC) is the state's umbrella organization for the land conservation community. We advocate for land conservation, stewardship and funding, and work to ensure the long-term strength and viability of land conservation in Connecticut.

CLCC advocates for tools that would increase the pace of land conservation, so we appreciate this opportunity to present testimony in support of **Senate Bill No. 129: An Act Establishing a Tax Abatement for Certain Conservation Easements (SB 129)**. SB 129 would enable, but not require, municipalities to establish a real property tax abatement program for landowners who grant a permanent conservation easement to a qualified entity (municipality, the state or a nonprofit organization, such as a land trust) for the purpose of protecting the corridor of a state-designated greenway.

There are currently over 130 land trusts serving the communities of Connecticut, representing the third most land trusts of any state in the country. Among the many services land trusts provide to their communities is establishing trails and greenways – not only connecting people to the land and providing access to the outdoors, but also protecting critical wildlife habitat and corridors through conservation projects that span town boundaries. Creating these trail connections is a collaborative effort, involving private and public stakeholders. Often, the permission to blaze a trail is based upon a hand-shake agreement between the current landowner and the land trust, and is not a long-term right that runs with title to the land and secures public access. This leaves a trail system vulnerable to disruption in the event the current or future landowner sells the property, revokes their permission, etc.

Should a municipality choose to adopt an ordinance enabling the tax abatement program, it would provide a small but important financial incentive for landowners to work with their local land trust to permanently create and maintain trail corridors that meet the conditions of the program as part of their land conservation efforts.

Throughout the pandemic, people across the state have turned to public and private open spaces, forests, parks, and trails – in record numbers – as a source of solace and safe refuge. We know that having access to these greenspaces is a necessity for all people, no matter where they live, in order to stay physically and mentally healthy. We also know that building connections between working and natural lands is essential to addressing the climate crisis, halting an alarming decline in biodiversity, and keeping our air and water clean – ecosystem services which enhance our quality of life and strengthen our local and state economies.

SB129 would provide a financial incentive to landowners willing to adhere to several conditions outlined in the bill to ensure that state-designated greenways are protected for all to enjoy for generations to come.

We ask that the committee approve the bill with a minor technical correction to line 16, where “or” should be changed to “and”.

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.

