

CONNECTICUT
Land Conservation Council

Testimony on House Bill No. 6744
Transportation Committee
Submitted by Amy Blaymore Paterson, Executive Director
February 27, 2023

Co-Chairs Cohen and Lemar, Vice-Chairs Lopes and Berger-Girvalo, Ranking Members Hwang and Kennedy, and members of the Transportation 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 the land conservation community in Connecticut.

Thank you for this opportunity to present testimony on behalf of CLCC in support of **H.B. No. 6744, An Act Concerning Tree Removal and Vegetation Management by the Department of Transportation.**

As a coalition organization, CLCC works with Connecticut's robust land trust community as well as DEEP, municipalities, and other entities committed to land conservation and addressing climate change at every level. CLCC was a member of the Governor's Council on Climate Change (GC3) Forests Sub-Group, a member of the Policy on Resilient Forests for Connecticut's Future (PRFCT Future) Working Group, and, most recently, a participant in the GC3 Resilient Infrastructure and Nature-based Solutions Working Group.

The GC3 Phase 1 Report: Near-Term Actions (January 2021) (GC3 Report) as well as Governor's Executive Order No. 21-3 (December 2021) recognize that our state's forestlands, trees, natural areas, and working lands are among our strongest defenses against the impacts of climate change. Forests and trees work both ways in mitigating climate change impacts — absorbing greenhouse gas emissions and also preventing the release of significant levels of carbon emissions that would be caused by deforestation and conversion of open lands to active development. It is essential that these benefits are considered at every level of planning and management of our state's natural resources. It is also essential that members of the public have confidence that there is a comprehensive system in place, including notice and an opportunity to provide input, in advance of tree removal and vegetation management undertaken by state agencies on public lands.

CLCC supports HB 6744 as a step forward in bringing accountability and transparency to the Department of Transportation's (DOT) plans for proposed tree removals along state highways. Provisions of the bill include the development of stronger and more detailed guidelines for tree removal and vegetation management, further oversight by a certified arborist prior to any tree removal, and improved requirements for advanced public notices and disclosures regarding these activities.

CLCC joins Connecticut Forest & Park Association in recommending that HB 6744 include a provision for "compensatory reforestation" – requiring DOT to replant trees to offset the impacts of the loss of trees removed along state highways. Compensatory reforestation is the subject of HB 6610, currently under consideration by the Environment Committee. We concur with CFPA that even if the application of compensatory reforestation proposed by HB 6610 is limited to activities undertaken by DOT, it would still be a step forward in offsetting the loss of trees and forests in Connecticut.

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

