

CONNECTICUT
Land Conservation Council

Testimony Senate Bill No. 336
Veterans' Affairs Committee
Submitted by Amy Blaymore Paterson, Esq., Executive Director
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Co-Chairs Cabrera and Boyd, Vice-Chairs Maroney and Napoli, Ranking Members Cicarella and Vail, and Members of the Veterans' Affairs 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.

Thank you for this opportunity to present testimony in opposition to **Senate Bill No. 336, An Act Exempting Veterans from the Passport to the Parks Motor Vehicle Registration Program Fee.**

Enacted in late 2017, the Passport to the Parks Program generates dedicated revenues to support the operation and maintenance of Connecticut State Parks, Forests, and Wildlife Management Areas. Supported through an annual \$5 fee that is applied through the Connecticut Department of Motor Vehicles to registration of non-commercial vehicles, the Passport Program provides Connecticut residents access to all State Parks for free, while helping to restore and support park services such as campgrounds, lifeguards and hours of operation at certain parks and nature centers.

One of the state's top tourism destinations, Connecticut State Parks are worth the investment -- generating \$3.3 billion in revenue and helping to sustain 41,721 jobs in 2020 (National Bureau of Economic Analysis - 2020 Report) In each of the three years since the Passport Program was established, State Park visitation increased at least 10% annually. In 2021 State Park attendance was reported to be over 13 million visitors.

Allowing this exemption will not only result in the loss of dedicated annual support for the parks system, but may lead to a "slippery slope" of requests from other categories of users.

The Passport Program is working as intended. While very sensitive to the nature of the request and with no disrespect to the honor and service of military veterans, we respectfully urge the Committee to leave the fee structure for this dedicated source of revenue intact.

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

