

CONNECTICUT Land Conservation Council

Testimony on House Bill No. 5064
Environment Committee
Submitted by Amy Blaymore Paterson, Executive Director
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Co-Chairs Lopes and Parker, Vice-Chairs Hochadel and Bumgardner, 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 ~117 land trusts. CLCC is a 501(c)(3) organization operating statewide. Our mission is to elevate and strengthen land conservation in Connecticut.

Thank you for this opportunity to present testimony in strong support of **House Bill No. 5064, An Act Concerning An Option to Purchase Restricted Agricultural Lands At Agricultural Value**, which would provide conservation tools to encourage and retain agricultural lands for agricultural purposes.

HB 5064 addresses two significant barriers to agriculture in Connecticut: First, access to affordable land is fundamental for individuals seeking to enter farming or expand their operations. However, the current market dynamics often price out aspiring farmers, particularly those who are new, beginning, and/or Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC), making it increasingly difficult for them to pursue their agricultural ambitions. Second, protected farmland, even land subject to an agricultural easement under the state's Farmland Protection Program, is not necessarily preserved *in perpetuity* for agricultural purposes, leaving it at risk of acquisition by individuals with no genuine interest in farming.

In 2024, the Department of Agriculture (DoAg), in partnership with CLCC, released [“Farmland Access & Ownership: An Overview of Barriers, Models, and Actions to Increase Land Access for Connecticut’s BIPOC Farmers”](#) (Farmland Access Report). Borne out of [DoAg’s Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Working Group 2023 Report](#) recommendations, and through interviews, listening sessions, and other research, the study examined the challenges and barriers to farmland access and ownership while seeking to inspire different cooperative projects with land trusts across the state.

HB 5064 incorporates many of the recommendations from the Farmland Access Report and other studies by creating a program through DoAg that would allow nonprofit organizations, municipalities, and regional councils of government to purchase agricultural easements, develop and implement farmland access and affordability programs (such as Buy-Protect-Sell, Lease-to-Own agreements, and other tools), and acquire options to purchase land at agricultural value (OPAV).

OPAV is a voluntary legal agreement that restricts the sale of land to only certain farmers or family members (“qualified farmers”) and limits the sale price to agricultural value (versus the higher fair



market value). This decreased value can make land with an OPAV more affordable for qualified farmers who want to purchase the land for agricultural purposes.

We urge the Committee to approve HB 5064, which would provide these conservation tools that help farmers generate revenue, make their land affordable for future farmers, and ensure that their land stays in agriculture.

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.