

CONNECTICUT Land Conservation Council

General Comments on House Bill No. 6485
Environment Committee
Submitted by Amy Blaymore Paterson, Executive Director
January 30, 2023

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 which provides oversight of DEEP's open space funding programs.

Thank you for this opportunity to present general comments regarding **House Bill No. 6485, An Act Concerning Natural Organic Reduction and Green Burials**. My comments are limited to Section 1 of the bill, as follows:

Expanding Use of OSWA Funds: CLCC supports the concept of green burials which are designed to have less of an impact on the environment. Several years ago, CLCC hosted a workshop on the topic at our annual Connecticut Land Conservation Conference and many land trusts have expressed interest in and investigated allowing for them on their preserves. However, we have concerns about using state open space grant funds (presumably the Open Space and Watershed Land Acquisition Grant Program [OSWA]) to fund green burial projects as provided for in Section 1.

Established in 1998 (CGS Section 7-131d to 7-131k, inclusive) and administered by DEEP, OSWA provides matching grants to municipalities, land trusts, and water companies ("conservation partners") for open space and watershed land conservation. A competitive grant program, demand for the program is robust and funding is limited. With DEEP's land acquisition efforts significantly off target, conservation partners are critical to accelerating the pace of land conservation across Connecticut to help meet the 21% goal. OSWA funding is essential to their efforts. Any proposal to expand the use of those funds beyond their intended purpose should be carefully considered.

Meeting OSWA Project Criteria: It is unclear from Section 1 whether the intent is to allow for green burials as part of the OSWA program (i.e. for eligible grantees with projects that otherwise meet OSWA project criteria) or the intent is to expand OSWA funding to a new category of grantees and project category (i.e. for projects by entities that may not be conservation partners and/or whose projects would not otherwise qualify for OSWA.) While we think it makes good sense to codify standards for green burials (Section 2 *et seq.*), many of those standards appear to be inconsistent with OSWA program criteria.

Requiring DEEP to Undertake a Report: Section 1 requires DEEP to undertake a report on how it may use open space funds for green burial projects, etc. While it is our understanding that green burials are legal in Connecticut, it is also our understanding that they are often complicated by local zoning and other municipal restrictions. With state standards not yet codified, we contend that it is premature to impose another reporting responsibility on DEEP, particularly when it is already struggling to meet its current responsibilities due to staff/budget shortages.

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.

