

CONNECTICUT
Land Conservation Council

Testimony on Senate Bill No. 454
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 support of **Senate Bill No. 454, An Act Concerning Park Replacement by Municipalities.**

This bill, long a legislative priority of the Connecticut Council on Environmental Quality (CEQ), seeks to clarify the intent of C.G.S. Section 7-131n. This section sets out a process for municipalities to follow in the event of the conversion of parkland owned or in the care of municipalities, including a requirement that the parkland be replaced at a ratio greater than one-to-one.

As highlighted in CEQ's testimony, courts have interpreted the requirement for an offset for municipal conversion of parks and other open spaces in C.G.S. Section 7-131n as limited to instances of land being "taken" through eminent domain. SB454 addresses this issue by including "conversion" and "repurposing"—the more common scenarios for changing the use of municipally owned lands.

CLCC is frequently contacted by citizens and community groups justifiably concerned about plans to convert or repurpose municipal parkland or other dedicated open spaces. We consistently contend that proposals to change the use of land that "was purchased for park or other recreational or open space purposes, or for which bonds were issued for such purposes, or which had been dedicated for such purpose" should be highly scrutinized. If such a transaction is legally permitted to proceed, SB454 seeks to clarify the requirements of C.G.S. Section 7-131n that the municipality replace the land and follow the public input process outlined in the law.

Given Connecticut's struggle to meet its 21% land conservation goal—and the economic, environmental, and social benefits of accessible parks and green spaces—this bill strengthens the state's commitment to smart, balanced growth by providing a clearer process to achieve it.

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.

