

# CONNECTICUT Land Conservation Council

Testimony  
Raised Bill No. 5491 Section 1(f)  
Government Administration and Elections Committee  
Submitted by Amy Blaymore Paterson, Executive Director  
March 25, 2022

Co-Chairs Flexer and Fox, Vice-Chairs Haskell and Thomas, Ranking Members Sampson and Mastrofrancesco, and members of the Government Administration and Elections 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 **in opposition to Section 1(f)** of **Raised Bill No. 5491, An Act Concerning The State Properties Review Board.**

Section 1(f) of HB 5491 would extend the authority of the State Properties Review Board (SPRB) to review real estate transactions of several state agencies, including the Department of Agriculture and the Department of Energy and Environmental Protection (DEEP). CLCC is particularly concerned about Section 1(f)(5) which would expand SPRB review to include transactions under DEEP's Recreation and Natural Heritage Trust Program (RNHT) and Open Space and Watershed Land Acquisition Grant Program (OSWA).

Established by statute in 1986 (*CGS Section 23-73 et seq.*), RNHT is DEEP's primary program for acquiring land to expand the state's system of parks, forests, wildlife management areas, and other natural open spaces. Since 1998, OSWA (*CGS Section 7-131d-k, inclusive*) provides matching grants to municipalities, land trusts, and water companies to acquire land for passive recreation, natural resource protection, fish and wildlife habitat, and to conserve critical watershed lands. Both programs are essential to the state's efforts in meeting its statutory 21% open space goal (*CGS Section 23-8b*).

RNHT and OSWA projects are already subject to extensive scrutiny. Due diligence requirements to ensure these transactions meet legal, financial, and organizational best practices include extensive review of appraisals, contracts, and other legal documents (including by the office of the Attorney General), title search and survey results, baseline documentation, and other elements of the transaction.

At a time when the state needs to ramp up the pace, quality, and scale of its land conservation efforts -- not to mention the efficiency and efficacy of grant processes -- it makes no sense to add an unnecessary and duplicative layer of administration and review to these critical and well-established programs. We strongly urge the committee to remove Section 1(f) of HB 5491.

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.

