

CONNECTICUT
Land Conservation Council

Testimony
House Bill No. 5456
Environment Committee
Submitted by Amy Blaymore Paterson, Esq., Executive Director
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Co-Chairs Cohen and Demicco, Vice-Chairs Gresko and Kushner, Ranking Members Harding and Miner, and members of the Environment Committee:

Thank you for this opportunity to present testimony on behalf of the Connecticut Land Conservation Council (CLCC) in opposition to **House Bill No. 5456, An Act Concerning Exemptions To The Passport To The Parks Fee For Seniors, Veterans And Certain Vehicle Owners.**

As the State's umbrella organization for the land conservation community, including its 137+ land trusts, CLCC advocates for land conservation, stewardship, and funding, and works to ensure the long-term strength and viability of the land conservation community in Connecticut.

Enacted in late 2017, the Passport to the Parks Program generates dedicated revenues to support the operation and maintenance of Connecticut State Parks. 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 supporting campgrounds, lifeguards and seasonal workers to maintain facilities for the public.

One of the state's top tourism destinations, Connecticut State Parks are worth the investment -- generating over \$1 billion annually for the state's economy and supporting over 9,000 private sector jobs. Since the Passport Program's first full calendar year in 2018, attendance at State Parks has increased 10% in both 2018 and 2019 to ~10 million visitors.

If passed, HB 5456 would not only cut over 50% of the funding that is currently supporting Connecticut State Parks every year, but would create a "slippery slope" of requests from other categories of users seeking an exemption from the fee.

The Passport Program is working as intended. We urge the Committee to leave the fee structure for this dedicated source of revenue intact with no exceptions.

On behalf of the Connecticut Land Conservation Council, I thank you for this opportunity to provide our comments. We would be happy to answer any questions you may have.

