

CONNECTICUT Land Conservation Council

Testimony
House Bill No. 5411, Section 2
Government Administration and Elections Committee
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Co-Chairs Flexer and Fox, Vice-Chairs Haskell and Winkler, Ranking Members Sampson and France, and members of the Government Administration and Elections Committee:

Thank you for this opportunity to present testimony on behalf of the Connecticut Land Conservation Council regarding **HB 5411, Section 2, An Act Concerning the State Properties Review Board.**

As the state's umbrella organization for the land conservation community, including its 130+ land trusts, the Connecticut Land Conservation Council (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. A consistent priority on CLCC's annual Conservation Agenda is to responsibly increase the pace of state land conservation and farmland preservation programs.

CLCC opposes Section 2 of HB 5411 which would extend the authority of State Property Review Board's (SPRB) to the review of state Community Farms Preservation Program (CFPP) (CT General Statutes Section 22-26nn). Established in 2008 and administered by the Connecticut Department of Agriculture, the CFPP serves to protect smaller farms of local economic importance that may not meet the criteria for the state's Farmland Preservation Program. The program has proven to be an essential tool in supporting municipal efforts in planning for and implementing local farmland preservation. The program is available to municipalities of all sizes, from our most rural to urban communities.

The state's long-term goal is to preserve 130,000 acres of farmland. To date, over 46,000 acres have been protected. With Connecticut having already lost 9,100 acres of agricultural land to development¹, it is critical that the state ramp up the efficiency and efficacy of its farmland preservation efforts.

CFPP projects are subject to extensive scrutiny from their inception to closing. Due diligence to ensure these transactions meet legal, financial and organizational best practices include detailed 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. Projects funded in partnership with USDA-Natural Resource Conservation Service must meet federal review requirements prior to approval. Finally, as a partnership program with municipalities, projects are also subject to a comprehensive local review and approval process including by the town's agricultural commission and executive governing body (town council or board of selectmen). Review of CFPP projects by the SPRB would create an unnecessary and duplicative step in the process.

Connecticut's agricultural industry is an economic driver in terms of food production, jobs, and quality of life. We urge the committee to remove Section 2 of HB 5411 in order to avoid redundancies in the CFPP review process and ultimately help to save more farmland at a time when we can't afford to lose anymore.

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

¹ *Farms Under Threat: A New England Perspective*, American Farmland Trust (2020)

