

CONNECTICUT  
Land Conservation Council

Testimony House Bill No. 5087  
Veterans' Affairs Committee  
Submitted by Amy Blaymore Paterson, Esq., Executive Director  
Connecticut Land Conservation Council  
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Co-Chairs Maroney and Borer, Vice-Chairs Daugherty Abrams and Boyd, Ranking Members Logan and Vail, and Members of the Veterans' Affairs Committee:

Thank you for this opportunity to present testimony on behalf of the Connecticut Land Conservation Council (CLCC) in opposition to **House Bill No. 5087, An Act Exempting Veterans from the Passport to the Parks Motor Vehicle Registration Fee.**

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, Forests, and Wildlife Management Areas. 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 helping to restore and support park services such as campgrounds, lifeguards and hours of operation at certain parks and nature centers.

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.

Allowing this exemption will not only result in the loss of approximately \$1 million in dedicated annual support for the parks system, but may lead to a "slippery slope" of requests from other categories of users.

The Passport Program is working as intended. While sensitive to the nature of the request, we respectfully urge the Committee to leave the fee structure for this dedicated source of revenue intact.

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.

