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March 11th, 2008

Commerce Committee Public Hearing

Representative Berger, co-chairman

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In Support of RE: SB 650: AN ACT EXTENDING THE HISTORIC PRESERVATION TAX CREDIT TO INCLUDE BARNs AND AGRICULTURAL BUILDINGS.

My name is Todd Levine and I am the Preservation Services Officer for the Connecticut Trust for Historic Preservation, which was chartered by the Connecticut General Assembly in 1975 with a number of specified purposes, but most prominently to stimulate the preservation and protection of Connecticut's historically and architecturally significant buildings and cultural landscapes. The Connecticut Trust is a non-profit, incorporated historic preservation organization, with 3000 members and affiliates across the state.

I am also co-director the Connecticut Trust's "Historic Barns of Connecticut." One of the goals is to document all of Connecticut's historic barns state-wide. We have documented over 1200 barns so far and continue to recruit non-profit organizations, municipalities and volunteers to do their part in surveying historic barns and agricultural buildings in their own town.

As you all know, we are losing our historic barns at an alarming rate. According to the National Agriculture Statistics Service from USDA, there were 25,000 barns on working farms in Connecticut in the 1920. In 2002, there were less than 5,000. There are probably another 5000 barns not in active agricultural use. The "Historic Barns of Connecticut" project has produced some startling numbers. In the 1970's, for instance, there was a Sturbridge Village sponsored survey of all the barns in Woodstock and Pomfret. Today, we've found 30 % of those barns are now gone. 30 % in 30 years. If we use this as a baseline across the state, we are in trouble.

As a result of the great need we have witnessed in our survey work, the Connecticut Trust recently announced a Barns Grant program, supported by funds from an appropriation from the Connecticut General Assembly in 2007. The grant deadline isn't until May, 2008, but we've received almost 30 grant pre-applications from private owners, non-

profit organizations and municipalities who own historic barns. The applications are from all over the state, from East and South Windsor, Glastonbury, Oxford, Rowayton, Thompson and Wethersfield, just to name a few. The number of applicants is expected to double by the May deadline. The Connecticut Trust Barns Grant can be used to find out what needs to be done to rehabilitate the barn or outbuilding; to find out what alternative uses are applicable to the barn or outbuilding, including zoning restrictions; and to nominate a barn to the State or National Register, making it eligible for grants and tax credits, like this one. The Connecticut Trust is providing the necessary first steps for barns to be restored and reused. But the biggest incentive to help our barns will be an extension to the current tax credit for historical commercial and industrial buildings to include barns and agricultural buildings.

There is a HUGE need for this tax credit program and I speak from experience. I talk to our constituents almost everyday about how difficult it is to afford to fix up their barns. When you hear from an elderly widow whose kids aren't interested in farming and she has a wonderful example of a 19th century English bank barn on her land, a structure that embodies Connecticut's agricultural origin, and she tells you, "I can afford to re-roof my house or re-roof my barn, which do you think I'm going to do," then you really see how this program can help someone like her do both.

The historic barn is a Connecticut icon. When one thinks of Connecticut, one thinks of rolling hills, covered bridges and the big, red barn. If we don't act NOW to preserve our heritage, in 100 years there won't be any barns left. I urge this committee to support Raised Bill 650.

Thank you.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Todd", followed by a long, horizontal, slightly wavy line that serves as a decorative flourish or underline.

Todd Levine
Preservation Services Officer