

Environment Committee

Public Hearing Testimony

Proposed House Bill Number 5495, An Act Concerning Fair Advertising For Connecticut Vineyards.

February 18, 2008

Good afternoon Chairmen Meyer and Roy, Ranking Members McKinney and Chapin, and members of the Environment Committee:

I am here to testify on **Proposed House Bill Number 5495**, AAC Fair Advertising for Connecticut Vineyards.

I believe the signs to which this bill refers are those which are offered to CT Farm Wineries which do not belong to the CT Vineyard and Winery Association (CVWA), a private, non-profit trade association. According to the Department of Transportation's policies only members of the CVWA are eligible for the **CT Wine Trail signs** (sign#51.6975) and wineries which are not members of the CVWA, may obtain the **Vineyard and Winery signs** (sign#51.6974). The DOT recently changed their policy for eligibility for these signs to include wineries located on state highways (prior to this change, wineries such as Taylor Brooke Winery in Woodstock and CT Valley Winery in New Hartford could not obtain these signs). The result of the change in DOT policy is that all wineries, regardless of their address, have equal access to the **Vineyard and Winery signs**. I support this proposed bill because it will strengthen the DOT policy.

However, the more widely used sign that best represent the CT Farm Wineries is the blue CT Wine Trail sign. That sign is directly connected to the CT Wine Development Council's "Passport to the CT Wine Trail" program, which is funded through the state's Department of Agriculture and has operated successfully for the past four years. Visitors to the wineries look for these distinct blue signs while driving throughout the state. Most out-of-state visitors who have similar wine trails in their states regard these signs as advertising all CT's wineries. However, as stated before, all wineries are not eligible for these signs.

Membership in the CVWA restricts wineries with less than 5 acres of planted grapes (i.e. Taylor Brooke Winery, Woodstock) and wineries who produce wine from fruit other than grapes (i.e. Holmberg Orchard, Gales Ferry) from becoming full voting members, allowing them to only join as associate members with no voting rights. Based on the membership restrictions of the CVWA and the policy of the State DOT, some farm wineries are prevented from obtaining CT Wine Trail signs, even though they participate in the state funded "Passport to the CT Wine Trail". This disparity creates an unfair advertising advantage to those members of the private association, CVWA.

CT Farm Wineries are the leaders in agri-tourism, attracting visitors from out of the state, and more importantly, encouraging our own residents to travel within CT resulting in increased revenues to the state. I believe it is in the interest of the State of CT to ensure that all farm wineries are represented equally and that all promotion of these wineries is clear to the public. Standardizing branding by the use of the CT Wine Trail signs for all farm wineries would be a significant move in that direction.

Therefore, I would encourage the committee to take this opportunity in proposing this bill to remedy all the signage issues as they pertain to CT Farm Wineries by addressing the issue of eligibility for the CT Wine Trail signs. I would suggest the following: All licensed farm wineries in the state of CT who are open to the public on a regular weekly basis at least six months of the year be eligible for CT Wine Trail signs. The number of signs for each winery shall be the same with the location(s) to be determined by the Connecticut Department of Transportation.

Thank you for your time and consideration in this matter.

Respectfully submitted,

Linda Auger, Vice President

Taylor Brooke Winery LLC

848 Rte. 171

Woodstock, CT 06281