

Connecticut State Grange

TESTIMONY OF THE CONNECTICUT STATE GRANGE IN OPPOSITION TO HOUSE BILL 6464, AN ACT CONCERNING COORDINATED PRESERVATION AND DEVELOPMENT

MARCH 2, 2009

The 4,000 members of the Connecticut State Grange oppose Raised Bill No. 6464, an Act Concerning Coordinated Preservation and Development, because it would create another layer of review that would slow down the purchase fo development rights to prime farmland and result in the unnecessary irretrievable loss of some prime farmland to development.

On a percentage basis, Connecticut is irretrievably losing its prime agricultural land to development faster than any other state in the United States. The current estimate is that all of our remaining farmland will either be lost to development or preserved through development rights easements within the next fifteen years. We need to preserve our prime farmland and we need to preserve it now.

The Department of Agriculture has a scoring system in place to determine which of the many parcels on which development rights easements are offered to the State are the most important to the preservation of prime agricultural land. The proposed purchases are reviewed by both the staff of the Department of Agriculture and the State Properties Review Board. These reviews are adequate to insure that farmland is preserved in blocks large enough to be farmed efficiently and that there are a minimum of nearby non-agricultural uses that will be offended or disturbed by normal farming operations.

Many farmers are finding it difficult to operate their farm profitably under the current economic conditions. They are offering to sell the development rights to their farms both to raise needed cash to keep their operation financially solvent and to prevent the irretrievable loss of their land to development. There have been instances where a farmer made an agreement with the State to sell his development rights, but because of

the time required for the State to complete the transaction the farmer had to sell his land, livestock and equipment to satisfy creditors before the sale of the development rights could be completed. The provisions of Raised Bill No. 6464 would cause further delays in the State's purchase of development rights and would result in the further irretrievable loss of our diminishing base of prime agricultural land.

Like many businesses and individuals, the State of Connecticut is faced with a serious loss of income. The Governor has recommended and requested that many unnecessary boards and commissions be eliminated to reduce spending. The provisions in Raised Bill 6464 that all proposed grants and transactions to preserve farmland, protect open space, provide for historic preservation and create affordable housing be reviewed by the Face of Connecticut Steering Committee would create much additional work for this committee which in turn would increase the committee's expenses and might necessitate the hiring of additional staff for the committee to duplicate work already being done elsewhere. The 4,000 members of the Connecticut State Grange therefore urge the General Assembly to prevent unnecessary duplication of effort and control the cost of government by rejecting Raised Bill 6464.

Thank you for your consideration of my testimony.

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