March 7, 2011

Members of the Committee;

As First Selectman of the Town of Southbury I feel it is my duty to voice my opinion on HB-5203.

The Town of Southbury is very concerned with the future of the State owned Southbury Training School property. By preserving over 900 acres of STS land and designating it only for agricultural purposes would be a large stride towards the State's goal of protecting 130,000 acres of farmland as stated in its planning and development policy. In 2010 The Connecticut Farmland Preservation Advisory Board recommended the preservation of the STS farmland and five other State owned properties.

Southbury's 2002 Plan of Conservation and Development specifically cites the importance of preserving agricultural land and has a stated goal of setting aside 20% of its land as open space by 2012. Open space preservation increases the quality of life and the rural character of Southbury, and this parcel is the last large farm in a town which 30 years ago was primarily a farming community.

By passing HB 5203 the State will add to its goal of farmland preservation, add to the State's agricultural economy (which contributes $3.5 billion and provides 20,000 jobs to the State) and stem the loss of nearly 8,000 acres of farmland to development every year.

On behalf of the citizens of Southbury and the State of Connecticut, I urge passage of HB 5203.

Harold W. Davis, Jr.

First Selectman

Town of Southbury