

Testimony in Support of S.B. 831: *An Act Concerning Municipal Liability For Recreational Activities On Certain Open Space Lands*

To: The Environment Committee

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Imagine having the good fortune to devote a full weekend to hiking.

You might even begin on the New England Trail, nearby in West Hartford. Heading south from the trailhead at Rt 44, you march along the old carriage paths near the Hillstead Museum, scramble over glacial erratics at Will Warren's Den and wind your way up Rattlesnake Mountain. If the day is clear, bask in the sunlit views atop Pinnacle & Kilkenny Rocks. And then, towards the end of your journey, explore the nooks and dales of Ragged Mountain. By sundown, you have hiked 18 miles and crossed through five towns.

Next morning, you could head north from the same trailhead. The trail leads along the length of the largest of the Hartford Reservoirs. You'd hike over Talcott Mountain, past the historic Heublein Tower and through the heart of Penwood State Park. For a time you'd walk in the steps of Chief Metacomet as he crossed King Philip Mountain and marvel as he once did at the spectacular views of the Farmington River Valley. All this, and still time left to for admiring the rapids at Tarriffville Gorge. During the course of this second day's hike, you have passed through four more towns and walked another 18 miles.

Over this one indulgent weekend, you'd have hiked 32 miles of our nation's newest national scenic trail, passed through nine towns and visited countless inspiring sites. You'd have admired old cedars gripping the ragged edge of the traprock; crossed brooks and hemlock groves. You'd have followed the flight of hawks on the high thermals. Mature woods and steep climbs would have kept you close company. You'd doubtless have acquired a few blisters, but you would have walked through a natural and historic wonderland along the spine of our state.

The trail alone links these special places.

You don't have to be a long-distance hiker, or even a hiker at all to appreciate the importance of the possibilities this one trail embodies, to appreciate the landscape this trail connects. The New England Trail travels 110 miles in Connecticut and intersects a variety of ownership types. But the linkages afforded by the New England Trail are tenuous. For a long time we've feared the dreadful impact that development would have on this green corridor. Recently we've come face to face with a new threat.

Recreational liability, if not restored to protect our municipalities, may mean that these wild places, these historic landmarks, would not be linked along a continuous corridor. Your hikes north and south may not have been possible if the municipal properties in Berlin, New Britain, Farmington, West Hartford, and East Granby closed themselves to recreation.

The New England Trail is one of many trails in the state. In all, more than 50 miles of blue-blazed hiking trails are hosted by the willingness and good graces of municipalities. The possibility that any

of these trails could be severed, their continuity snapped by nothing more than the possibility of lawsuits, should give us all pause.

I am in my line of work so that others can discover the wonder of the outdoors; to ensure opportunities exist for children to learn and explore outside their classroom. Trails offer an explorative outlet for old and young alike. They are imperative in maintaining our link to the natural world. If we want to maintain access to our greenways, our open spaces, our parks, and our trails, if we want to continue to promote healthy, outdoor activity, we need the recreation liability law fixed. We need to do it now, in this session, because it is long overdue. I strongly urge you to support S.B. 831 and I thank you for this opportunity to speak here today.