

Testimony of Jamie Jones
SB 992 An Act Concerning Connecticut Wine Festivals
Before the Environment Committee
February 23, 2011

Members of the Environment Committee, my name is Jamie Jones and my family owns the Jones Family Farms and Winery in Shelton. Due to business matters I am unable to deliver this testimony in person, but it is very important to vineyards across the State. I am the President of the Connecticut Vineyard and Winery Association (CVWA). We are a private, non-profit association of twenty (20) farm wineries from around the state. Our goal is to promote the cultivation of grapes, spread awareness of the quality wines being produced in our state and market our businesses through the Connecticut Wine Trail brochure and our website. Together our farms comprise over 2000 acres of open space and our businesses received 500,000 visits from travelers searching for local wines. We are an important part of both Connecticut's beautiful landscape and local economy. I come before you today to voice our support for SB 866 An Act Concerning Connecticut Wine Festivals.

A couple of years ago the General Assembly gave the CVWA the ability to host a wine festival to help bolster our business. Our industry relies heavily on tourism and the festival has been a wonderful way for us to draw in new consumers at a central location who then visit our permit premises. We would like to thank you for this ability. This year we are asking to increase the number of festivals to two per year.

An important part of our business model has been the passport program. It encourages visitors to travel to numerous Connecticut Vineyards throughout the course of the year. Each visitor is given a Connecticut Vineyard "passport." After they visit several wineries their passport is stamped and can then be entered into a drawing to receive a trip to an exotic location, such as Tuscany or France. The program has been a huge success and contributes to a large portion of our business. The funding for this important initiative is given to us by the State of Connecticut through a budget allocation to the Farm Wine Development Council. We realize in these tough economic times that it will most likely not be possible to obtain this funding again. If the Association were able to have a second festival, we would be able to raise enough money to keep the "passport program" alive. This would help us in our goal to encourage people to visit our farms but also to become self sufficient and be able to do our own marketing without the help of the State.

Please consider allowing us to hold a second festival and help us keep our businesses alive in difficult times. If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact me. Thank you for your consideration.