

Testimony opposing Section 14 of
HB 1196, An Act Concerning the Conveyance of Certain Parcels of State Land

Dear Chairpersons Slossberg and Morin:

The Branford Land Trust opposes the conveyance of any portion of the 17.4 acre State-owned open space property in Haddam to private owners for development. Our opposition is based on two considerations.

The first is the location of the property on the banks of the Connecticut River. The environmental importance of the lower Connecticut River is indicated by its recognition by several conservation organizations. It is listed as a wetland of international importance under the Ramsar Convention, The Nature Conservancy has designated it as one of only forty "Last Great Places" in the Western Hemisphere, and the entire Connecticut River is one of only fourteen American Heritage Rivers. Seventeen acres of undeveloped land with river frontage has a high value for the biological community that requires both a large contiguous area and direct access to the river. The bill's stipulation that the conveyed property "shall not include any land with frontage along the Connecticut River" does not provide adequate protection of the many features of the Connecticut River that are recognized by the designations noted above.

Second, when the State acquires land specifically to be held as open space, people in the local community, the region and throughout the state must be able to rely on the State to protect the property for the future. Conveying the property to a private developer, even in exchange for other undeveloped land, violates the trust that the public and conservation organizations like local land trusts have placed in the State as a partner in protecting the community's critical natural resources. In developing their Plans of Conservation & Development, communities assume that protection of land as open space by the State means that they can depend on that protection continuing into the future. This proposed conveyance destroys that partnership and those assumptions.

Respectfully submitted,

The Board of Directors
Branford Land Trust
Branford, Connecticut