

## Testimony in opposition to HB5306

Senator Doyle, Representative Taborsak and members of the General Law Committee, I am writing today to oppose the proposed Bill 5360 which seeks to require licensing of certain landscaping companies. I am a long time board member of the Connecticut Grounds Keepers Association with approximately 200 members and also the owner of a landscape contracting company, Ivy League Landscaping, LLC based in West Haven, CT.

The Connecticut Grounds Keepers Association and other organizations like us promote professionalism, education, responsibility and ethical conduct for our members. While we do this on an ongoing, voluntary basis, the groundwork is set and the information is available to those who seek it. There is no shortage of individuals or companies in Connecticut who exemplify the qualities I have mentioned. Additional legislation will provide no effective barrier to entry for people who choose to operate outside the vast array of existing laws. Rather than add more complication and obstacles to doing business in Connecticut, you should consider other options which would help to level the playing field within the current regulations. As evidence of the effort the Connecticut Grounds Keepers Association makes towards goals like yours, we host annual conferences with outreach and education provided by University of Connecticut professors and CT Agricultural Experiment Station staff. Again, the information, guidance, outreach and networking is available without the need for an additional state license.

The landscaping industry in Connecticut is already laden with existing regulations. Citizens who wish to operate legitimate and professional landscape contracting companies with three or more employees in Connecticut are required at a minimum to register with:

- The Secretary of State – for business formation.
- The Internal Revenue Service – for income taxes, Social Security Administration purposes in addition to the Federal Unemployment Tax Act.
- Department of Revenue Services – for taxes including sales tax and the business entity tax.
- Department of Consumer Protection – for a Home improvement Contractor Registration, or a New Home Construction Contractor Registration for installation work.
- Department of Labor – to be able to contribute to CT Unemployment Compensation Fund.
- Department of Motor Vehicles – for motor vehicle registration.
- Department of Energy and Environment – if applicable for pesticide applications.
- Local Municipalities – for a variety of reasons, primarily local property tax and permit issuance depending upon the building code requirements of certain projects.

In addition, a basic requirement of business is the maintenance of insurance including liability, motor vehicle and workers compensation coverage. Some of the existing regulations require this already.

I can provide more evidence of my organization's dedication to goals of professionalism, ethics, and safety. In the past, we provided voluntary certification through a national program called the CLT (Certified Landscape Technician) program with a trade group called PLANET. In addition to holding the CLT Certification, I have provided instruction and administered the test with the help of our University of Connecticut Plant Science educators (Steve Rackliffe and Steve Olsen). This program still exists nationally, but because of local funding shortages does not currently test in Connecticut. Other groups offer scaled down versions of landscaper certification already.

As legitimate, registered companies, we often face the consequences of well-intentioned regulations gone awry. A simple example of this comes with an issue that I have spent many years working on. That is, our State of CT DEEP Pesticide regulations. Once registered, a company is permanently on the radar so to speak. Our regulators spend their time auditing and researching those companies who have complied with the law rather than investigating those who avoid responsible behavior. I worked diligently to change this behavior a few years ago, only to watch our mandatory fine for unlicensed applicators provision lose its teeth as the State of CT decided that the fines imposed would be absorbed into the general fund rather than stay in the DEP (Environmental Quality Fund) as originally legislated. The inspectors went from focusing on unlicensed applicators back to the regular visits to the compliant crowd. There is no doubt that the same violators know that the DEEP as well as the Department of Consumer Protection can really only track you if register in the first place. If they are not registered under the multitude of existing rules, what makes you believe they will comply with one new requirement? Enforcement of existing regulations seems more pertinent than additional mandates to already burdened state departments.

I encourage you to consider my opinion and would be eager to discuss other options which may help accomplish similar goals should you decide to continue in this direction. More regulations and an additional license are not the pathway to the goals you have listed in the proposed legislation. I appreciate your time and look forward to any questions you may have.

Cordially,

Philip W. Grande

Connecticut Grounds Keepers Association – Treasurer  
Ivy League Landscaping, LLC – Owner  
Soundview Landscape Supply, LLC - Owner