

Testimony on SB 445, An Act Concerning Liability for the Recreational Use of Land

My name is Leslie Lewis. I am the Director of the WalkCT Program at the CT Forest and Park Association, the oldest non-profit conservation organization in the state. I am commenting on SB 445, An Act Concerning Liability for the Recreational Use of Land.

The WalkCT program was initiated five years ago in reaction to the alarming rise in obesity in our citizens, particularly children and youth. The Department of Public Health was a strong supporter of our effort. Through the walkct.org website, we encourage people to utilize not just trails but village sidewalks, town parks, and other public properties to develop active, healthy lifestyles. Many of the walking locations listed on the site are on municipal property, and we receive site visits from almost 2000 people per month. I would hate to think that municipalities might begin to withdraw their pathways from the website because of renewed concerns about liability.

WalkCT also promotes walking as a tourism and economic development tool for communities. Active vacations are one of the fastest growing segments of the tourist industry. Travelers on foot spend up to one-third more, on average, than those using other modes of transportation. Why would we want to have a potential chilling effect on municipalities who should be working to make their walkways and village centers more appealing?

The 2005 – 2010 State Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan contains a survey of Connecticut citizens who were asked to name the recreational amenities they would most like to see developed in their communities and across the state. Paved multi-use trails were the number one facilities that people wanted to have access to. The proposed amendments in SB 445 could prevent the expansion of our trail systems and could limit the recreational opportunities of our residents and our visitors alike. I urge you to vote against SB 445 and let stand the 2011 Public Act that represented the will of our people.