

**Testimony of Gerald Arel
Manchester, CT**

Opposed to S.B. 445

As District Sales Manager for Eastern Mountain Sports I also see the direct connection between accessible and attainable outdoor recreation and the economic stimulus to our overall economy. Eastern Mountain Sports has been a contributor to the economic landscape in Connecticut since 1979, currently operating 7 stores and employing 135 people. The accessibility and growing popularity of close-to-home outdoor recreation venues has supported continued growth in our industry. We have expanded 3 Connecticut locations in the last 2 years, and remain committed to serving our communities by actively supporting the sustainable use and enjoyment of our State's outdoor resources like bike paths, beach boat launches and hiking trails. Bringing these experiences to life helps to foster an appreciation for and a connection to an active and healthy lifestyle.

There are several reasons why I am opposed to S.B. 445. As an avid outdoor enthusiast, the accessibility of our State's open spaces is extremely important to me. The current accessibility of local hiking, bicycling, climbing and paddling areas remain my go-to places to enjoy the outdoors. Town and State owned lands comprise the majority of these venues, and the liability protection the current law provides helps to ensure they remain open and accessible for me, my friends and my family's continued enjoyment.

Some of our State's many miles of maintained hiking trails utilize boardwalk structures to offer accessibility to fragile ecosystems while minimizing the erosion and impact of foot traffic. Beaches offer the accessibility of small craft launching, providing abundant opportunities for paddling - both kayaking and canoeing as well as small-craft fishing. Paved sidewalks make up the structure of many Connecticut miles of our bicycling trail system, offering accessibility of fitness and recreation far away from the safety concerns of our heavily trafficked streets. These specific features are currently key protected components of our outdoor recreational landscape. Continuing this protection will be critical to the sustained enjoyment of our open spaces.

Connecticut currently enjoys a varied and accessible outdoor experience for both residents and visitors alike; supporting active recreation and a vital connection to a more sustainable, healthy lifestyle. Access to outdoor venues in recent years for families, young people and outdoor enthusiasts has increasingly become more elusive rather than available as a result of increased liability exposure and economic pressure. While we're ahead of this trend presently here in Connecticut, the proposal of S.B.445 to exclude existing liability protection on Boardwalks, Public Beaches and Paved Sidewalks for recreational use will place their continued access in jeopardy. I respectfully request that S.B. 445 does not move forward.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify on this important matter.