



March 21, 2012

Planning & Development Committee  
Senator Steve Cassano, co-chairman Senator Eric Coleman, co-chairman

In Support of Raised Bill 5537 An Act Establishing a Property Tax Program to Encourage the Preservation of Historic Barns.

My name is Todd Levine and I am director of Historic Barns of Connecticut, a Connecticut Trust for Historic Preservation project. I am here today to speak in **support** of Raised Bill 5537. The Connecticut Trust for Historic Preservation was founded in 1975 by a special act of the Connecticut General Assembly. The Historic Barns of Connecticut project was started in 2004 when the Connecticut Trust recognized that we were losing our barns at an alarming rate. Since then, we have documented more than 8,000 barns in the state, given out nearly \$300,000 in Barns Grants for the stabilization of historic barns. We are widely recognized as one of the most comprehensive barn programs in the nation.

Raised Bill No. 5537 would authorize towns and cities to grant property tax relief to barn owners of historic barns (barns 75 years old or older that are listed on the State or National Register of Historic Places) who agree to maintain their structures throughout a minimum 10-year preservation easement. This bill will stimulate investment in barn preservation. We've found that a little money and a little incentive to preserve barns goes along way. Our small Barns Grants, for instance, leverage roughly two dollars of private investment for every one dollar of grant funds that are used for barn preservation.

As someone who has firsthand knowledge from the owners of our state's historic barns, I can tell you that this bill would be greatly appreciated by your constituents. Almost to a man (or woman), private owners of historic barns have mentioned to me that they feel a burden of being taxed on the square footage of a barn, especially large barns. Some barn owners have even told me that they are better off letting their barns fall down because they are too financially strapped to repair them.

For many of our state's historic barns, there may be a future use for them that the current owner hasn't considered, either back to agriculture, which is happening a lot nowadays, or to a new adaptive re-use. Another benefit of the barn tax abatement is the incentive to maintain one's barn, which will help create jobs; a new roof, a new paint job, foundation repairs, all these jobs are done by in-state resident contractors.

I'll wrap up by saying that our barns are a part of Connecticut's heritage and our cultural landscape; people love to drive around the state and see our old barns. But no one loves their barns as much as the owners. If we show them that we love them too, they will be more likely to preserve them.

Thank you for your time.

Todd Levine

Director, Historic Barns of Connecticut