Testimony Re: H.B. 5830
An Act Establishing an "Adopt A Park" Program

Eileen Grant
Friends of CT. State Parks, President
43 Neptune Ave.
Madison, CT. 06443

Dear Members,

Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony regarding H. B. 5830 which proposes the establishment of an "Adopt A Park" program by legislation. The Friends of CT State Parks (FCSP) feels this bill is unnecessary and may have the unintended effect of actually discouraging citizens from volunteering in parks.

No impediments presently exist which prevent those who wish to step forward and assist in parks to do so. Countless numbers of Connecticut citizens over generations have freely offered their services to help maintain and enhance our communal green spaces. The majority of FCSP 's 24 volunteer member groups have worked in parks for 25 years, "adopting" them without any need for legislation authorizing their involvement. Our organizations have flourished and contributed substantially to the Parks and Forests System, not in spite of being unbound by regulations, but because we have been free to be creative and innovative. Most of our groups are 501c non-profit corporations with well-delineated bylaws and clear mission statements; they take great care to operate responsibly in state facilities. Our collective membership has grown to 6900 individuals; last year alone members donated 79,000 volunteer hours. That donated labor is valued at $2.2 million per annum. In addition, we have given $8million collectively in funds, lands and goods to the System since our first group's inception.

The majority of volunteer members are mature professionals deeply embedded in their communities; they would balk at the imposition of agency "requirements" that could make volunteer work more like a second job (with all the associated bureaucratic annoyances) than an opportunity for joyful giving.

Indeed, the temptation could arise to try to transform volunteers into quasi staff. The level of park personnel is abysmal; operating budgets are wholly inadequate. Help is desperately needed. However, volunteers are not and never can be substitutes for skilled park workers. Our talents are additive; they are not the baseline skills critical to park operations. We cannot operate heavy machinery, repair buildings and infrastructure, police visitors or control traffic. We cannot save people from drowning or rescue them from mountainsides. A too heavy reliance on volunteer labor leaves citizens exposed to mishap in our parks and does nothing, unfortunately, to ameliorate infrastructure deterioration. Friends, who have worked with such dedication to improve parks, would be more than a little dismayed if their

efforts had the unfortunate result of diminishing resources allotted from the General Fund.

The Friends feel the bill's language with regard to corporate sponsorship is really unclear as to intent. Companies along with many civic groups have, over the years, participated in one-day work projects, donated equipment or educational materials, and offered expertise on park programs. The need to establish "requirements for sponsorship" indicates that the future association envisioned by DEEP between parks and the private sector will change in some way. FCSP would be more comfortable if the rationale for that prospective change was better articulated; we would prefer that DEEP indicate prior to any enacted legislation the limitations to be placed on corporate sponsorship, so that we might be assured that no conflicts of interest would arise, and that parks would not be cluttered with sponsors' promotional materials.

Respectfully submitted,

Eileen Grant
President Friends of CT State Parks