

TESTIMONY - RAISED BILL NO. 6538
AN ACT CONCERNING ARBORISTS AND TREE WARDENS

State of Connecticut General Assembly - January Session 2013
ENVIRONMENT Committee

March 8, 2013

Dear Members:

Good morning. My name is Dr. Robert Ricard and I am a faculty member with the University of Connecticut. I am speaking for myself. I teach urban forestry and organizational behavior and governance. I speak in favor of Raised Bill No. 6538 as I believe this is a significant step forward in the professionalization of Connecticut tree wardens.

Since I came to UConn in 1991 I have devoted much of my career to improving tree warden performance. In that first year I conducted and published a state-wide needs assessment of the “state of CT urban forestry” and have repeated this research in 2001 and 2011 as well. To learn what other states did with tree wardens, I conducted and published New England wide research on tree wardens (tree wardens is a New England only phenomena). This research included original legislative history of the laws.

Based on this research I learned that tree wardens were unorganized and lacked coordinated training and education, and, more important, they lacked professional standing and cohesion.

To change this status, I formed the Tree Wardens’ Association of Connecticut, Inc. in 1992. With UConn support and the efforts of many dedicated and devoted tree wardens and urban forestry professionals and organizations, the Tree Wardens’ Association of Connecticut, Inc. quickly became the leader in tree warden education and leadership.

One critical development—and very pertinent to Raised Bill 6538—was the formation of the *voluntary* Tree Warden School and Certification Program in 1998. I have managed this program for 15 years. Development of this was a direct response to the lack of qualifications for tree wardens missing from state law. My duties include constructing the curricula, organizing the course, recruiting and managing participants and lecturers, conducting the course, and writing and grading the final exam. I also keep the records. I have even been deposed in a few lawsuits about these standards. We instituted a Continuing Education requirement and I maintain the records for this too. To date roughly 300 people have participated in the program.

I tell you this only to assure you that I have been intimately in engaged tree warden professionalization for more than two decades. I know well what Raised Bill 6538 will do if passed. I also know what will happen if the bill does not pass. Tree warden professionalization will stagnate. The result will be progress in increasing tree wardens’ ability to both protect the

public from harm *and* reforest the states municipal forests will plateau if not decline. Even though more than half of the municipalities have been engaged in improving tree warden abilities, too many have not. This is unacceptable.

I affirm that the Tree Wardens' Association of Connecticut, Inc. and I as an UConn faculty member will be able to handle the increased or altered tasks were the bill to pass.

In 1901 the original legislators who passed the tree warden law got it mostly right—they missed on the qualifications part. You have a rare, historical opportunity to “fine tune” an otherwise progressive and profound 112 year old environmental law. Pass Raised Bill 6538.

Thank you for your consideration.

Respectfully submitted,

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