



February 20, 2013

Planning & Development Committee  
Senator Steve Cassano, co-chairman  
Representative Jason Rojas, co-chairman

**In Support of SB 817 An Act Establishing a Property Tax Program to Encourage the Preservation of Historic Barns.**

My name is Charlotte Hitchcock and I am a Barn Historian for the Historic Barns of Connecticut program of the Connecticut Trust for Historic Preservation. I am here today to speak in support of SB 817.

The Connecticut Trust for Historic Preservation was founded in 1975 by a special act of the Connecticut General Assembly and is a statewide non-profit resource for preservation and re-use of our historic buildings.

Since 2004 the Trust has been documenting historic barns; we have over 8300 in our data base which is publicly available at [www.connecticutbarns.org](http://www.connecticutbarns.org). A great many of the barns are in need of stabilization work, for example roof, timber frame, and foundation repairs. To address this need we established a very small Barns Grant matching grant program, funded both with state money and money from private foundations. Our small program stimulates preservation of needy barns but it cannot possibly cover the great need in every community to preserve barns.

SB 817 authorizes towns and cities to grant property tax relief to barn owners of historic barns who agree to maintain their structures throughout a minimum 10-year preservation easement. **We recommend the addition of a stipulation that the barns be listed on the State or National Register of Historic Places, as this ensures that the benefit is extended to our most significant structures.**

We believe this kind of specific incentive for barn owners will stimulate investment in barn preservation. Many barn owners feel it is best to let their barns and silos fall down because they are too financially strapped to repair them and do not want to risk an increase in assessment as a result of making improvements. We must help owners care for their certified historic barns and encourage them to find uses for these structures. Otherwise we will continue to lose the barns that form a key part of our scenic landscape and heritage. We are losing them now at an alarming rate – every major storm whether wind or snow, causes more barns to collapse because they have lacked basic maintenance over the years.

For many of our state's historic barns, there may be a future use that the current owner has not yet considered, either back to agriculture or a new adaptive re-use. A further benefit of the barn tax abatement is that jobs will be created for roofers, timber-framers, engineers, masons and the like. These labor-intensive jobs are done by in-state resident contractors.

Barns are a significant part of Connecticut's heritage and cultural landscape; people love to travel around the state, to see our old barns, and shop at our farmstands. As interest grows in locally-sourced foods, these precious buildings can and should be brought back to life.