



TOWN OF SOUTHBURY

OFFICE OF THE FIRST SELECTMAN

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**Testimony in support of H.B. 6542
AN ACT AUTHORIZING AN AGRICULTURAL CONSERVATION EASEMENT ON THE
LANDS OF THE SOUTHBURY TRAINING SCHOOL.**

Submitted by Ed Edelson, First Selectman, Town of Southbury

Senator Meyer, Representative Gentile and Members of the Environment Committee:

At the outset, let me say that I have yet to find anyone in Southbury who is against the permanent designation of these lands for agriculture. Southbury is proud of its agricultural heritage. The ability to preserve these lands, which played such an important part of the town's history, is an important objective that has consistently scored highly in surveys done in support of Plans of Conservation and Development that have been prepared over the years.

Of course, the history of the Southbury Training School has been such that parents and guardians have been concerned about any discussions about the future of the school. This is completely understandable. However, the agricultural lands can be permanently preserved for farming without any impact on the operation of the School or its residents.

The converse is not true. We cannot continue to ignore these prime agricultural lands without having an impact on their ability to be farmed with the type of long term commitment that farming requires. As the saying goes, by choosing not to decide you still have made a choice. In this case, weather and nature have been at work. Beautiful farm buildings are not maintained. They begin to deteriorate and in some cases barns have collapsed. Trees and invasive plants have begun to take their toll on pastures. Waiting any longer before deliberate action is taken to encourage farming will make future efforts more expensive and time consuming.

The Department of Agriculture has laid out ambitious and creative ideas for the use of these agricultural lands. I applaud those ideas as a way to encourage a rebirth of farming in our community. As with any industry, some amount of clustering is important to provide the type of infrastructure and support to keep a thriving industry going. Given the size and quality of these lands, this could become a new economic generator for the region as farming requires support for equipment and processing. It is also supportive of the tourism in our area including the many fine restaurants that are looking for more local food products.

Finally, the importance of these lands to the environmental quality of our community cannot be overstated. As the former executive director of the Pomperaug River Watershed Coalition, I had many conversations with the late Dr. Marc Taylor about the role of agricultural lands in preserving and protecting our aquifers and high-quality drinking water.

In closing, let me say how much I appreciate the strong support that these ideas about the future of the Southbury Training School lands have received from the Governor and his staff. His leadership on open space and specifically agricultural lands has been clear to me for many years. With this bill, the legislature has the opportunity to follow through with legislation that is good for our town, good for agriculture in our region and good for the State. I urge you to vote yes on Raised Bill 6542.

Thank you for your consideration.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Ed Edelson". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Ed" being more prominent than the last name "Edelson".

Ed Edelson
First Selectman, Southbury