



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

Submitted by Tom Crider, President of the Southbury Land Trust [3/15/2013]

Senator Meyer, Representative Gentile and Members of the Environment Committee: My name is Tom Crider and I'm President of the Southbury Land Trust. I'm here to speak in favor of this excellent bill.

The Southbury Land Trust is a non-profit organization whose mission is to preserve farmland and other open space. As such we would qualify to be holders of the conservation easement authorized by HB 6542. We currently own or hold easements on eleven farms in Southbury. Because of its significance as the largest unprotected property in our area, we've been advocating the preservation of the farmland at the Training School for several years.

The 1400+A Southbury Training School property contains the largest parcel of farmland left in Southbury. Preserving this land would be a major step toward keeping what remains of the rural character of our town intact. It's also essential to the survival of agriculture in our region. This bill would achieve preservation in a logical, thoughtful way—first, by transferring responsibility for the farmland to the Department of Agriculture and then by giving the land legal and permanent protection by means of a conservation easement. When accomplished, these steps will insure that over 800A of prime farm and forest land will be used for agricultural purposes.

This bill helps achieve a goal stated in the Conservation and Development Policies Plan for Connecticut which is "...to maintain and support the viability of the agricultural sector to increase a long-term, in-state food producing capacity... through conservation and preservation of prime agricultural lands."

For the past decade or so the State has spent millions of dollars to purchase the development rights on Connecticut farms, but to date only about 37% of its goal of 130,000A has been protected. This bill is a significant advance toward that goal and could provide a template for preserving other valuable state-owned farmland.

We urge you to pass this bill, which in a time of serious financial constraints, offers a way to permanently protect a significant amount of farmland at no cost! Thank you for your consideration.