

SB 70

To the ENVIRONMENT COMMITTEE

RE: S.B. 70 (RAISED) - An Act Concerning the Preservation of Lands under the Control of the Department of Energy and Environmental Protection and the Department of Agriculture.

Testimony for presentation at the hearing on the above legislation on February 19, 2014

I wish to indicate my SUPPORT for S.B. 70 as highly needed legislation to ensure the permanence of open space and recreation lands in the State, while at the same time providing a thorough and transparent process of review for situations which may warrant a property transfer.

I speak as a person who has lived in the State for a long time, who is a resident of Haddam and a member of the Connecticut River Gateway Commission and as such became intimately familiar with the circumstances surrounding the now infamous "Swap" legislation which was rescinded last year, , and, finally, as a person whose career at Northeast Utilities centered on the management of open space lands, and as such learned much about the location, character and abundance of such lands, and the benefits derived therefrom.

What my experience has taught me that open space, recreation and remaining agricultural lands are one of the State's MOST PRECIOUS RESOURCES, and they are becoming more so every day, as more and more of the State is swallowed up by development, typically in the form of relatively small 2 to 3-acre residential lots with their accompanying retail and office counterparts.

Such a process is irreversible, and there will come a time when the only publicly accessible open space and the only agricultural lands in the State will be those that were deliberately preserved for these purposes. Given the ever greater difficulty and cost of acquiring more such land, it is essential that we preserve what we have if we are to maintain Connecticut as healthy and competitively attractive place in which to live, over the next generations.

It is therefore appropriate that S.B.70 provide means of assuring that when land or land rights are acquired for open space or agricultural purposes, that such an intent be subsequently enforceable, and that if circumstances require a change in ownership and use, that there be in place a process that allows for a well-informed considered decisions, drawing on both expert and public input, in full public view.

That clearly was not the case with the Swap. This is not the moment to recap the convoluted series of events associated with the swap legislation and the aftermath of its passage. Suffice it to say that much pain would have been avoided if the basic facts had been fully evaluated beforehand so that the information would have been there for the public to see and the legislators to contemplate, including the comparatively low market value of the lands which the developers

were offering in exchange for DEEP's parkland. More importantly, the events of the Swap brought to light that, until the system was fixed, any piece of open space and agricultural land in the State could be similarly offered up for sale, regardless of the original conservation intent of the purchase, and with minimal consideration its conservation and recreation value to the citizens of the State.

S.B. 70 seeks to correct this situation and for this reason it deserves your support.

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