



**STATE OF CONNECTICUT
DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE
DEPARTMENT OF ENERGY AND ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION**

Public Hearing – February 21, 2014
Planning and Development Committee

Joint Testimony Submitted by Commissioner Steven K. Reviczky and Interim Commissioner Robert J. Klee

Raised House Bill No. 5139 - AN ACT CONCERNING THE USE OF STATE FUNDS FOR THE INSTALLATION OF SOLAR PANELS ON PRIME FARMLAND

Thank you for the opportunity to present testimony regarding Raised House Bill No. 5139 - AN ACT CONCERNING THE USE OF STATE FUNDS FOR THE INSTALLATION OF SOLAR PANELS ON PRIME FARMLAND. The Department of Energy and Environmental Protection (DEEP) welcomes the opportunity to offer the following testimony.

DEEP takes the concern underlying the proposed legislation very seriously and strongly agrees that the State's policies for deploying clean, renewable energy projects should be harmonized with its policies for preserving prime farm or forest lands. Prime and important farmland, is defined by USDA, as "land that has the best combination of physical and chemical characteristics for producing food, feed, fiber, forage, oilseed, and other agricultural crops with minimum inputs of fuel, fertilizer, pesticides, and labor, and without intolerable soil erosion, as determined by the Secretary."

The State of Connecticut has committed tens of millions of dollars over the last decades to preserve prime and important farmland for agricultural use. Similarly, DEEP has done much to protect the state's valuable farmlands from development, including preservation of nearly 160,000 acres of state forest.

Small-scale photovoltaic installations, including those supported by CEFIA programs, can help supply power for use on a specific property and can be sited in locations that do not diminish the agricultural utility of the land. Rooftops, including those on barns and other agricultural buildings, provide ideal locations for small-scale photovoltaic installations.

DEEP believes that it can work effectively within existing authority to ensure that future grid-scale renewable energy procurements incent project developers to utilize sites such as brownfields and other disturbed lands that are ideal for clean energy developments.

We also recognize the concern of Connecticut's Clean Energy Finance and Investment Authority (CEFIA) that Raised House Bill No. 5139 would amend CEFIA's the enabling statutes and we would agree that doing such is problematic. We would also note that the title of the bill does not reflect that fact that we believe the committee's concern deals with procurements made on behalf of ratepayers with ratepayer, not State, funds.

We look forward to continuing the dialogue with advocates and members of the Planning and Development Committee about these and other issues presented by Raised House Bill No. 5139.

Thank you for the opportunity to present testimony on this proposal. If you should require any additional information, please contact Robert LaFrance, DEEP's Director of Governmental Affairs, at 860.424.3401 or Robert.LaFrance@ct.gov (or, Elizabeth McAuliffe, DEEP Legislative Liaison, at 860.424.3458 or Elizabeth.McAuliffe@ct.gov).