

Connecticut State Grange

TESTIMONY OF THE CONNECTICUT STATE GRANGE IN SUPPORT OF
RAISED BILL 70, AN ACT CONCERNING THE PRESERVATION OF LANDS UNDER THE
CONTROL OF THE DEPARTMENT OF ENERGY AND ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION AND
THE DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

FEBRUARY 19, 2014

I am Gordon Gibson of Vernon, Legislative Liaison for the Connecticut State Grange. I am speaking today in support of Raised Bill 70, An Act Concerning The Preservation of Lands Under The Control of the Department of Energy And Environmental Protection and the Department of Agriculture.

I worked in the Land Acquisition Division of the former Department of Environmental Protection for 19 years so I am very familiar with the many situations concerning land exchanges addressed in Raised Bill 70. There have been many exchanges where a parcel of limited value to the State=s programs and goals was exchanged for a parcel that contributed much more value to the State=s programs and goals. Unfortunately I am also familiar with parcels of significant value that were traded off for parcels of questionable value and of parcels of significant value that were saved only because someone in the DEP Land Acquisition Division happened to know the value of a parcel that was about to be traded as surplus property.

Subsections (h) and (i) in Raised Bill 70 are very important to preserve parcels under the custody and control of agencies other than the Department of Energy And Environmental Protection and the Department of Agriculture, but they do not go far enough. The State owns many acres of prime farmland that is under the custody and control of agencies other than the Department of Energy and Environmental Protection or the Department of Agriculture. A prime example of this is the land at Southbury Training School where the 2013 General Assembly approved the granting of a conservation easement to protect land formerly used as part of a farming operation at the school. There are large tracts of land at places such as the University of Connecticut and the former Mansfield Training School that should be preserved from development by the agency or institution that currently has custody and control. The Department of Corrections used to operate a large farm in Enfield and Somers. The custody and control of that property never changed agencies but over the years much of that prime farmland has been permanently lost to agriculture by the construction of additional correction facilities. Subsection (i) of Raised Bill 70 should be expanded or a new subsection added to mandate that a review, approval and preservation process be completed before any development commences to insure that there is no net loss of any land of high conservation value.

Thank you for your consideration of my testimony.

Gordon F. Gibson, Legislative Liaison
Connecticut State Grange
836 Hartford Turnpike, Vernon CT 06066
860-871-7757, GGibson@CtStateGrange.org