

*Testimony of Russell Brenneman,  
Westport. CT*

Public Hearing Subject Matter	Position
RAISED S.B. 70: AN ACT CONCERNING THE PRESERVATION OF LANDS UNDER THE CONTROL OF THE DEPARTMENT OF ENERGY AND ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION (DEEP) AND THE DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE (DOAG).	Support

Co-Chairs Meyer, Gentile and Members of the Environment Committee:

I urge the prompt enactment of S.B. 70. It is a modest and long overdue step in the right direction.

Much of the land embraced by this Bill could be looked at as “heritage” land in that it was given to the people of the State of Connecticut by uncommonly generous donors, or acquired through resources provided by previous generations or set aside by far sighted citizens. The land in question is emblematic of our state’s rich history of protecting urban as well as “open” land for public use and enjoyment or to serve some other public purpose.. Indeed, we have been pioneers. The New Haven Green, Bushnell Park and Peoples State Park come quickly to mind as only the most obvious early examples, as are the contemporary goals of the very law that S.B. 70 amends.

This Bill and the frightening stories in the recent CEQ report lead us to think about the nature of the State’s “ownership” of such property. A case can be made that it is not ownership as generally understood but a temporary holding by the State of formal title. However that title arguably is held solely as custodian or trustee of property that has been received from a former generation and is to be passed on to the next. The interest of our time as custodian or trustee is always be modulated by the interests of others.

So much for philosophical context. That is not the way it works. In the real world whatever present day administrators and legislators choose to go after wins out. Ungoverned by any process of constraint, today’s politics carries the day. No matter what the nature of the property. The CEQ report shines a bright light on this tawdry business.. S.B. 70 puts some very modest brakes on what would otherwise continue to be going on. Some heritage and other land that would otherwise be up for grabs will receive some measure of protection.

The Bill will not solve all the issues but it is a step in the right direction. In my opinion, even more safeguards are needed, but that may be a conversation for another day.