



TO: Sen. Steve Cassano and Rep. Ed Jutila, Chairmen,
And the Members of the Government Administration and Elections Committee

Testimony from Rivers Alliance of Connecticut
Public Hearing, Monday, March 14, 2016, on

RB 5619, AA CONVEYING CERTAIN PARCELS OF STATE LAND AND REQUIRING A STUDY
OF CERTAIN STATE REAL PROPERTY.

Rivers Alliance of Connecticut is a statewide non-profit organization, founded in 1992, as a coalition of river organizations, other conservation non-profits, individuals, and businesses working to protect and enhance Connecticut's rivers, streams, aquifers, lakes, and estuaries. We promote sound water policies and water stewardship through education and assistance at the local, regional, and state levels.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the Conveyance Act of 2016 -- and for the fact that the Act is shorter than most of its counterparts in recent years. This testimony will ask you **not** to support Sections 5 and 8 of the bill. I have also included a summary of the other sections that we have circulated in case residents in the regions of the proposed conveyances would like to comment. The summary does highlight a few questions, such as: what is the reason that some properties are conveyed at no cost, or large cost (not this year), or minimal cost.

PLEASE OPPOSE

Sec. 5. **A study to be done by OPM and DAS** to evaluate "any real property owned by the state that is zoned for residential use by local zoning authorities but is located in a zone authorized to contain commercial structures, as authorized by the municipality." The study shall conclude with a report that shall "recommend transferring such properties and any legislation necessary to expedite the approval process under state and local authority." **Comment:** First, we believe that such a land-use study should be done in consultation with DEEP. More important is the question of what problem this study is aimed at solving. How many state-owned properties are in a residential zone, according to local zoning authorities, but are authorized by the municipality to contain commercial structures? This sounds like some sort of local conflict (or conflicts?) that someone wants to resolve by legislative fiat. The mandated "study" is more like an order. It must conclude with recommendations for transferring the properties. (There's no option for just leaving them alone. No limitation on to whom they shall be transferred.)

Sec. 8. In **Groton**. *Conveyance of 60+ acres (in 6 parcels) of CT DEEP waterfront property to the town of Groton for no cost.* This section provides that Groton shall use the land for "economic, development, recreational and open space purposes," in other words, for almost anything that come to mind. This property, with accompanying buildings (formerly the Mystic Education Center/Oral School), has

significant conservation values and is a valuable coastal property as well. **Comment:** This is a major transfer of public trust resources and property. It is not appropriate to include it in the Conveyance Act, which, in theory, should deal only with scraps of state-owned land of minimal public or private value.

SUMMARY OF THE OTHER SECTIONS OF THE ACT

Sec. 1. In **FRANKLIN**. Town is buying for \$500 1 acre on Sodom Road and Rte 132 for open space. Presently owned by DOT, includes portion of two parcels, one labelled Leonard E. Day and containing two sheds and a house, and the other labelled Paul D. and Anne E. Gaudet. **Comment:** Looks fine, unless the former owners (Day and Gaudet) have questions.

Sec. 2. In **WILTON**. DOT is conveying to the town, a 1-acre lot and a 2.8-acre lot on Rte. 7, immediately north of the Wilton High School. Price is administrative costs (minimal). The Act says, “ ... the first parcel of land and any improvements upon said parcel [shall be used for] for recreational and municipal purposes and the second parcel and any improvements upon said parcel [shall be used for] or an earth material storage yard. **Comment:** “recreational and municipal purposes” could be anything. What do the people of Wilton think about the proposed uses?

Sec. 3. In **MANCHESTER**. Board of Regents for Higher Education (BOR) is conveying to the town at no cost about .3 acres on Hillstown Road for highway and traffic purposes. **Comment:** Sounds good. (Note, it’s not clear why some conveyances have a cost and others do not. Also, the conditions of the conveyance are unusual: “The State Treasurer shall execute and deliver any deed or instrument necessary for a conveyance under this section, which deed or instrument shall include provisions to carry out the purposes of [this section]. The [BOR] shall have the sole responsibility for all other incidents of such conveyance.”)

Sec. 4. In **SOUTHBURY**, the state Department of Administrative Services (DAS) is transferring to the town 45 acres the containing the Southbury Training School Personnel Village east of South Britain Road. The purpose is to be housing, in particular, low income senior housing. The price is administrative costs, plus, the town will have to conduct an environmental impact evaluation (EIE) to be submitted to the Office of Policy and Management (OPM). This is part of the complex process of possibly (or probably) closing the Southbury Training School. Three years ago, in Public Act 13-90, 800 acres of undeveloped land were preserved as farmland and open space. **Comment:** The Southbury Land Trust and others report that the present conveyance is fine and was previously discussed with preservation stakeholders. Rivers Alliance would like to see the EIE go to DEEP as well as to OPM. We also believe that a conveyance of this size should have a public hearing in the Environment Committee or at least be a part of a separate bill.

Sec. 6. In **MIDDLETOWN**. 3.4 acres in the Connecticut Valley Hospital (CVH), a portion of the parcel containing the Mary Shepherd Home, to be used for “permanent supportive housing purposes.” The price is \$1. The intention is to convey or lease the property to another party for the supportive housing purpose, “with a focus on veterans.” The CVH is another state-owned property, similar to the Southbury Training School, in which the disposal of the property is a complex matter. **Comment:** The conveyance

looks fine, but it does not involve the kind of scrap of land appropriate in Conveyance Act provisions. We hope that more details will be given in the hearing, in particular what instrument will be used to make the proposed housing “permanent,” as the Act’s language requires.

Sec. 7. In **Greenwich**. 5.8 acres to be conveyed by DOT to the town for open space and parking at the Bruce Museum. The price is administrative costs. The property is reported as a 25-foot wide strip between the museum and I-95. Price is administrative costs of conveyance. **Comment:** This sounds like a wonderful idea. We assume legislators will have better informed comment from the residents of Greenwich.

Margaret Miner, Executive Director
Rivers Alliance of Connecticut, Litchfield, CT
rivers@riversalliance.org 860-361-9349