

TESTIMONY OF ELISSA WRIGHT

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In Opposition to Section 8 of Raised H. B. No. 5619, AN ACT CONVEYING CERTAIN PARCELS OF STATE LAND AND REQUIRING A STUDY OF CERTAIN STATE REAL PROPERTY

*Before the Government Administration and Elections Committee
March 14, 2016*

Senator Cassano, Representative Jutila, and members of the Government Administration and Elections Committee, thank you for the opportunity to submit this written testimony in opposition to **Section 8** of Raised H.B. No. 5619, *An Act Conveying Certain Parcels of State Land and Requiring a Study of Certain State Real Property*.

I would like to express my strong opposition to the proposed conveyance to the Town of Groton of some sixty-seven acres of undeveloped land along and near the Mystic River, most of which currently is protected open space under the custody and care of the Department of Energy and Environmental Protection (DEEP). A large part of the land that is proposed for transfer comprises a portion of the 122-acre state-owned Mystic Educational Center (the former Mystic Oral School), and was retained by DEEP (then DEP) for conservation purposes in November of 2010 when the state decided to place the remainder of the site (specifically the interior, westerly area with buildings) up for sale.

Attached for your information is a map of the Mystic Educational Center site showing the open space areas retained by the state for open space protection, which are indicated in green on the map. The two largest of these state-owned open space parcels; PIN 271018207236E (24.5 acres); and a 36.8-acre portion of PIN 261906386767E; adjoin and “bookend” a significant municipal open-space holding (39.5 acres) of the Town of Groton, known as the River Road Property (indicated in red on the attached map). The River Road property was acquired by the town in 1989 with proceeds of a 1988 municipal open space bond referendum and is dedicated and restricted in its uses to open space, conservation, and recreational purposes. These combined holdings of the state and town create an open space linkage joining together some 101 acres of wooded open-space land into a cohesive whole in a rural area along a designated scenic road on the west bank of the northern section of the Mystic River.

The proposed conveyance also includes three narrow waterfront parcels along River Road; PIN 271018408826E (4 acres); PIN 261907581499E (1 acre); and PIN 261910463851 (0.5 acre); all also indicated in green on the attached map.

The Mystic River itself is a significant natural, scenic, recreational, economic, and tourism asset of the region and the state. The state-owned open space at issue provides crucial protection both for water quality in the river and adjacent coastal waters, and also for contiguous and nearby conservation land along the Mystic River and immediate upland environs. This provision of the Conveyance Act is a case-in-point underscoring the need for a Constitutional Amendment to ensure the strongest long-term protection for our public state park, forest land, farm land or other conservation, recreational, open space or agricultural lands, such as the provision embodied in S. J. Resolution No. 36 on your public hearing agenda today which I wholeheartedly support.

It is not clear what, if any, “economic development” plans the town envisions for these state-owned open-space lands if the legislature were to authorize their conveyance. Or what impact a conveyance would have on the market value and marketability of the remaining “developed” portion of the state facility. However, the open space protection that these lands currently enjoy under DEEP’s stewardship would most certainly be weakened and could be cast in doubt altogether.

Retention of these lands in state ownership advances the important state goal, established in General Statutes § 23-8, to have at least twenty-one percent of the state’s land area held as public open space. In order to best ensure the conservation of these wooded open space and watershed protection lands in perpetuity, I strongly urge your rejection of Section 8 of Raised Bill No. 5619.

Thank you very much for your consideration of this matter. If there are questions or you require additional information, please do not hesitate to contact me.