

Senate Joint Resolution No. 36 RESOLUTION PROPOSING AN AMENDMENT TO THE CONSTITUTION OF THE STATE TO PROTECT CERTAIN PROPERTY HELD OR CONTROLLED BY THE STATE FOR CONSERVATION, RECREATION, OPEN SPACE OR AGRICULTURAL PURPOSES.

Government Administration and Elections Committee - March 14, 2016 Hearing

Submitted by: Pamela Aey Adams
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Dear Sen. Cassano, Rep Jutila and Members of the Committee,

My name is Pamela Adams and I currently serve as the President of Friends of CT State Parks (FCSP). I am writing in support of S.J. 36.

The Friends feel that the Constitutional Amendment (S.J. 36) is one of the most important pieces of Legislation to be raised in many years. All too often, parcels of Connecticut's State Parks, Forest and Agricultural land are surreptitiously conveyed to towns or private developers without due process or compensation. These lands belong to all of the citizens of Connecticut. They were acquired, maintained and developed with tax dollars contributed by the hard working taxpayers of this state.

FCSP feels strongly that a Constitutional Amendment is necessary to better protect Connecticut's public lands. Legislative conveyances of public lands have had and continue to have several damaging impacts:

1. Fragmentation and loss of state holdings that are ecologically valuable, important for healthful outdoor recreation, and necessary for viable farming;
2. Landowners are dissuaded from giving property to the state even if their donation contains a deed restriction;
3. It wastes state and private resources researching and fighting potential losses; and
4. It breaks faith with our predecessors who worked hard to preserve these lands, and with future generations who deserve such special places in an increasingly urbanized future.

S.J. 36 is not intended to stop the conveyance process. It is merely asking that a more open and transparent public process be employed when land held for agricultural, conservation or recreational purposes is proposed to be taken away from the taxpayers. If this significant action is to be taken, it should be done in the sunlight, not in the shadows. To that end, FCSP believes that public lands with agricultural, conservation, or recreational values:

- Should not be given away, sold, traded, or have their uses changed without a public hearing in the town or towns where the public lands are located;
- Should not be given away without compensation that equals or exceeds the values being lost in the region where they are being lost;

- Should have a higher standard than a simple majority vote (we recommend a 2/3 majority vote) to approve a conveyance of public lands; and
- Should only be considered in separate bills so that bad proposals are not bundled with benign ones.

FCSP applauds S.J. 36 as written but suggests additional language. Specifically, if a sale, transfer, or change of use for public land is proposed, then:

- 1) Expenses associated with holding a public hearing should be borne by the proposed new landholder and not by the state agency currently holding the land in question;
- 2) Expenses associated with determining fair market value (e.g., conducting appraisals) should be borne by the proposed new landholder and not by the state agency currently holding the land in question;
- 3) The ultimate approval of fair market value should be made by the state agency holding the land in question; and
- 4) Minor administrative boundary adjustments that do not diminish the conservation, open space, recreation, or agricultural purposes of the land should be exempted.

FCSP would like to thank the GAE for raising this Constitutional Amendment. The Friends of Connecticut State Parks and our 24 State Park Friends organizations, with 6,000 members statewide, wholeheartedly support this amendment and ask that Legislators do the right thing for Connecticut's citizens and our state's precious lands and resources by voting to support S.J. 36.

Thank you.