



State of Connecticut

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES STATE CAPITOL

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Testimony

In Opposition of HB 5619

AN ACT CONVEYING CERTAIN PARCELS OF STATE LAND AND REQUIRING A STUDY OF CERTAIN STATE REAL PROPERTY

In Support of SJ 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

Recently, I submitted a letter to the National Fish and Wildlife Service in support of the Great Thicket National Wildlife Refuge, which is to restore the habitat of an array of animals, protect Native American stone work, and dedicated to managing shrub land in Southeastern Connecticut, and most specifically Groton, one of two municipalities I am proud to represent in the General Assembly. Initiatives like this, as well as existing efforts to protect open space and create new state parks, are the primary reasons I strongly support SJ 36, and express opposition to HB 5619.

It is essential to establish the principle that properties acquired within the public funds be protected in perpetuity from exploitation by commercial interests working behind the scenes with public officials. While there are entirely appropriate reasons for certain public properties to be returned to the private sector, using an open and scrupulously fair process, certain properties must never leave the public domain once acquired. Such properties include state parks and forests and those properties which due to their priceless scenic locations, are of especial value. These properties were acquired with the hard-earned dollars of taxpayers solely to ensure they remain in their pristine state forever. Last year, I adopted Bluff Point State Park and Haley Farm State Park, two protected parks visited by many Connecticut residents. Undeveloped land should be afforded the same protection.

While I admire Rep. John Scott's efforts to find a productive use for the Mystic Oral School property currently managed by the Department of Administrative Services, doing so by ceding 68 acres of DEEP protection to the town of Groton is the wrong approach. This property is one of the few remaining undeveloped parcels along the Mystic River, so it's in our state interest to maintain its protection. Nothing is precluding DAS from working in tandem with municipal government within the current property boundaries. Additionally, I will not support any conveyance bill that does not receive a local public hearing in Groton, as outlined in the proposed constitutional amendment. If our state is serious about achieving its goal of protecting 21% of the state's land preserved as open space, that the General Assembly consider putting a moratorium on proposed property transfers that are facing local opposition. In all, this proposal is another example of a short term municipal revenue gain for long term environmental and fiscal losses.

Public land designated for passive recreation, preservation, conservation, and agricultural is hard to come by in today's age, so it is of great importance that such a policy is cemented in our Connecticut Constitution. To quote the brilliant Joni Mitchell, or for purposes of greater clarity for fellow millennials, Counting Crows, "Don't it always seem to go, that you don't know what you got till it's gone." For the sake of protecting beautiful, uncorrupted land for future generations, let's support SJ 36 and oppose HB 1138.