

To the Planning and Development Committee:

Feb. 10, 2017

Re: ***Proposed H.B. No. 6926 AN ACT PERMITTING MUNICIPALITIES TO IMPOSE A BUYER'S FEE ON THE CONVEYANCE OF REAL PROPERTY.**

I am submitting the following testimony on support of bill number 6926. My name is Benjamin Oko. I am a member of the Town of Ridgefield's Conservation Commission, a member of the Fairfield County Regional Conservation Partnership, on the land and natural resources planning group for Sustainable Connecticut and an appointed member of the State's Forest Advisory Council.

The need for the preservation and stewardship of land has never been greater. It is the keystone to clean air and clean water. It provides for resiliency helping to combat climate change. It provides educational and recreational opportunities for our citizens.

At the same time of this greater need, the budget problems of the State of Connecticut and the unlikely support from our new federal government leaves us without much in the way of public funding. Indeed, this year's State budget again looks like it will take monies slated for land protection through the Community Investment Act to enhance the general budget.

This legislation will create a path for monies to be available for land protection, either through purchase or through easement. It will also allow for funds to take care of lands already protected, a necessary part of environmental protection as unmanaged lands can deteriorate. It is money that can encourage private donors and foundations to aid in these protections. In fact, the groups I belong to, see this multiplier effect equal in importance to the money itself.

The form of this legislation should be appealing to the legislators. The enabling format means that only communities that wish this fee to be imposed will have the fee imposed. It is NOT a State imposed regulation. It is NOT an additional tax. Because it excludes the first \$150,000, it protects those selling lower priced housing.

At this time, when the State cannot move towards its goal of 20% of Connecticut's land be protected; at this time, when there is concern that the State may be increasing the burden of local property taxes, this legislation gives communities a tool that they can employ, only should they wish to, that will benefit everyone. Land protected anywhere benefits the air and water for everyone not just in the community where it resides.

Respectfully, Benjamin Oko, M.D.

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