

CONNECTICUT STATE GRANGE

TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF RAISED BILL NO. 102, AN ACT CONCERNING MINOR REVISIONS TO ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION AND AGRICULTURE-RELATED STATUTES

FEBRUARY 23, 2018

I am Gordon Gibson of Vernon, Legislative Liaison for the Connecticut State Grange, speaking today in support of Raised Bill No. 102, An Act Concerning Minor Revisions to Environmental Protection and Agriculture Related Statutes. The Grange supports all of this bill and particularly supports Sections 5 and 6 which will give the Commissioner of Agriculture authority to incorporate federal farmland protection clauses into State easements to preserve farmland when appropriate.

When the Connecticut Department of Agriculture first created their farmland preservation program I was working at the Department of Environmental Protection supervising the acquisition of land for state parks, forests, wildlife areas and flood control projects. The Department of Agriculture had no real estate expertise so I helped them develop their first program to preserve farmland. Since then a number of changes have been made in the farmland preservation laws and regulations to accommodate situations that were not anticipated in the early days of the program.

There have also been situations where the statutes concerning the Department of Agriculture's authority to could not be changed fast enough to accommodate particular situations so Connecticut Farmland Trust, Inc. stepped in to help solve the problem.

In one particular case Connecticut Farmland Trust acquired a development rights easement to protect an entire farm subject to similar easements in favor of the United States Department of Agriculture because USDA could legally accept easements on only those portions of the farm where they had worked with the farmer to improve the pastures.

Last August when USDA Secretary Sonny Perdue made a brief stop at Prides Corner Farm in Lebanon I had the opportunity to ask him about the possibility of giving the state offices of USDA authority to modify some of the federal programs to meet the needs of their state because agriculture is so diverse across the United States that different regulations are needed in different states and said that, "One size does not fit all."

Secretary Perdue agreed with me and spoke about his desire to give more authority to the USDA state offices.

The proposed changes in Sections 5 and 6 of Raised Bill 102 would give the Commissioner of Agriculture latitude to adjust our Connecticut farmland preservation programs so they could work with the USDA programs to preserve our diminishing farmland in Connecticut. Giving this authority to the Commissioner of Agriculture would show the U. S. Department of Agriculture that we are ready to work with them and should make Connecticut qualify for more federal funding of programs to preserve our diminishing

farmland base.

Thank you for your consideration of my testimony.

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