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Testimony of Eric Hammerling, Executive Director, Connecticut Forest & Park Association

Public Hearing Subject Matter	Position
S.B. 102: AN ACT CONCERNING MINOR REVISIONS TO ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION AND AGRICULTURE-RELATED STATUTES.	Support Sections 1-6. Oppose Section 7 being included in this bill.

The Connecticut Forest & Park Association (CFPA) is the first conservation organization established in Connecticut in 1895. For over 120 years, CFPA has offered testimony before the General Assembly on various State Park and Forest, trail recreation, sustainable forestry, and land conservation issues.

Sections 1-4 of SB 102 were put forward by CT DEEP after being thoroughly discussed and unanimously accepted by Connecticut’s Forest Practices Advisory Board (FPAB) established by Sec 23-65g. Sections 5 and 6 of SB 102 were put forward by the CT Department of Agriculture. **CFPA supports Sections 1-6** which are all non-controversial, as you would expect in a bill focused on “minor revisions,” and are briefly described below:

- Section 1 includes some technical changes to the Northeast Forest Fire Compact;
- Sections 2 – 4 amend the Forest Practices Act as follows:
 - Adds a 60 day grace period for forest practitioners who fail to renew current certifications by their expiration date. This avoids the need for reexamination and additional fees which are burdensome both for forest practitioners as well as DEEP;
 - Enables Connecticut to accept another state's or professional organization's forest practitioner occupational license or certification obtained through examination as substitute for Connecticut's Certified Forest Practitioner exam. This would make it easier for practicing foresters from other states to become certified and conduct business in Connecticut, and this kind of reciprocity is typical throughout New England; and
 - Streamlines forest practitioner continuing education reporting requirements. Again, this would be a benefit both to DEEP’s understaffed Forestry division as well as to forest practitioners.
- Sections 5 - 6 are technical changes but are absolutely critical to enable the Department of Agriculture to protect farmland through conservation easements developed cooperatively with federal farmland preservation programs. This is very important to enable Connecticut to leverage federal funds to protect farmland and keep farmers farming.

However, Section 7 proposes a significant word change – from “materially” to “permanently” – that could essentially “fast-track” the siting of solar facilities on land with core forests or high value agricultural soils. **We ask that the Committee remove Section 7 from S.B. 102 and consider it either as a separate bill or as part of a more comprehensive piece of legislation focused on the proper siting of renewable energy facilities.**

Thank you for the opportunity to submit this testimony, and I am glad to respond to any questions you may have.