



STATE OF CONNECTICUT DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE



Raised Senate Bill 102, An Act Concerning Minor Revisions to Environmental Protection and Agriculture-Related Statutes

Raised Senate Bill 102, *An Act Concerning Minor Revisions to Environmental Protection and Agriculture-Related Statutes*. This bill, in part, was raised at the request of the Connecticut Department of Agriculture.

The department is strongly supportive of sections 5 and 6 of this bill.

This language modification is necessary to keep Connecticut eligible for federal funds for its farmland preservation efforts.

Due to changes in federal law as part of the 2014 Farm Bill, the United States Congress ended the federal Farm and Ranchland Protection Program (FRPP) and created a successor program under the Agricultural Conservation Easement Program (ACEP).

FRPP, 7 CFR 1491.1 et seq., is specifically referenced in CGS Sec. 22-26cc(j) and Sec. 22-26nn(k). This proposal addresses the federal change in program nomenclature by referencing & CFR 1468.1, et seq. and provides flexibility in the event that Congress creates a successor farmland protection program to ACEP.

ACEP is a critical component of the farmland preservation work that we do in Connecticut.

Through this program, the State of Connecticut receives significant federal funding for the acquisition of development rights to qualifying farms negotiated and purchased by the State of Connecticut through the Department of Agriculture. Currently the Department of Agriculture has cooperative agreements with the United States Department of Agriculture totaling \$12 million and has a pending application totaling \$2.5 million.

Without the agency's requested technical change in this bill, these federal dollars would no longer be available to Connecticut.

While the Department of Agriculture wholeheartedly supports the technical revisions in Sections 5 and 6 of this bill, the agency would like to continue to work with the committee on Section 7.

The agency supports the state's renewable energy goals and believes there are opportunities to meet those goals without diminishing the state's vital natural resources and without sacrificing the state's agricultural economic viability. The agency would like to continue to work with the committee on Section 7 to achieve the following goals:

Enact a more specific, measurable and predictable standard for evaluating the potential impact of a project on forests and farmland when determining eligibility to use the declaratory ruling process.

Clarify what information the Siting Council must consider in determining eligibility for declaratory ruling pursuant to Section 16-50k, and during certification proceedings pursuant to Section 16-50p.

Because this is a policy area of significant concern to the Committee, the department would welcome the opportunity to participate in conversations with committee members, DEEP, and stakeholders on this important topic.