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University of Connecticut

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Gordon Gibson
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CT Forest & Park Association

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CT Farm Bureau Association

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Jones Family Farms

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Kathy Ruhf
Land for Good

Jim Smith
Cushman Farm

Keith Stechschulte
Farm Credit East

Shannon Yearwood
End Hunger CT!

STAFF

Chelsea Gazillo - Director
cgazillo@farmland.org

Armando Paolino - Lobbyist

Working Lands Alliance Policy Statement SB 5254 Environment Committee Public Hearing February 4, 2019

Dear Co-Chairs Cohen and Demicco, Vice-Chairs Gresko and Kushner, Ranking Members Harding and Miner, and members of the Environment Committee:

The Working Lands Alliance appreciates this opportunity to submit testimony in support of HB 5254, legislation to enable a local option for land conservation and stewardship funding.

My name is Chelsea Gazillo and I am the Director of the Working Lands Alliance (WLA), a broad-based, statewide coalition dedicated to preserving Connecticut's farmland. WLA includes such organizations as American Farmland Trust, the CT State Grange, New Connecticut Farmer Alliance, End Hunger CT!, Connecticut Land Conservation Council and the CT Farm Bureau, among many others. As an Alliance, we care deeply both about saving Connecticut's farmland and ensuring a healthy agricultural sector and prosperous future for Connecticut's farmers. As such, the issue that this bill seeks to address has prompted a significant amount of discussion within our coalition.

If enacted HB 5254 would allow (but not require) towns and municipalities, including Bolton, Bozrah, Bloomfield, Bethany, Coventry, Hartford, Lyme, New London, Norfolk, North Stonington and Warren, to establish a dedicated fund to acquire, preserve, and steward open space and farmland at the municipal level by including a conveyance fee of up to 1% paid by buyers of real property.

Municipalities across Connecticut need innovative ways to create options to fund land use projects and farmland preservation efforts. To reach the State's goal of protecting 130,000 acres of farmland, Connecticut's communities can and will need to be more active partners in this effort. This pilot program gives participating towns a tool to do that, enabling them to leverage state funds through the Farmland Preservation or Community Farms programs, and federal funds through USDA's Agricultural Conservation Easement Program. It also enables towns to prioritize the land that the local community, including its farmers, feels is most important to protect.

Farmland is the foundation for CT's agricultural industry--an industry which, according to a 2017 study by the University of Connecticut, contributes up to \$4



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billion in economic output and provides 21,696 direct jobs. Protecting agriculture's resource base is an important piece of sustaining viability. The state Department of Agriculture has made important investments in doing so through its Farmland Preservation Program, preserving more than 44,000 acres of farmland on 365 farms.

Connecticut's natural resources are what make this state such a wonderful place to live, work, and recreate. Providing communities with the tools to take a more active role in the conservation and stewardship of their local lands will help keep it that way for generations to come.

The Working Lands Alliance brings a broadly unique viewpoint to this issue based on the comprehensive nature of our organization. We would be happy to answer questions or make any clarifications on this bill, or on these topics more broadly. Please feel free to contact me anytime at cgazillo@farmland.org if you have any further questions regarding HB 5254.

Please support HB 5254. Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Chelsea Gazillo
Working Lands Alliance Director