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### Working Lands Alliance Policy Statement Policy Statement H.B. 7408 Public Hearing April 5, 2019

Dear Members of the Finance, Revenue, and Bonding Committee:

The Working Lands Alliance appreciates this opportunity to submit testimony opposing H.B. 7408 – Section 6 – An Act Concerning Municipal Revenue and Stormwater Authority, Studies of the Pilot Grants Program and a Property Tax Exemption for Machinery and Equipment, and Enterprise Zones

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 CT Farmer Alliance, CT NOFA, CT Land Conservation Council, CT NOFA, and the CT Farm Bureau Association, 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.

We strongly oppose Section 6 of H.B. 7408. If passed, this legislation would have dire consequences on land conservation organizations across the state. This municipal fee would be imposed on 501c3 nonprofit organizations and land trusts who protect CT's land from development.

Our state has ~137 land trusts and most are small, privately-funded, volunteer-based groups established to conserve open space for the public's benefit. Several studies conclude that protecting land actually saves money for municipalities because undeveloped land avoids the need for most municipal services – e.g., police, fire, water/sewer infrastructure, and public schools – that would otherwise be required if that same land were developed. Furthermore, in general, properties in close proximity to protected open space, farmlands, and/or recreational amenities are more valuable than other comparable properties, and therefore generate additional property taxes for a municipality. In this way (plus avoiding costs), land conservation organizations are already contributing to the municipal tax base.

Our organization, by its very mission, is committed to conserving land in perpetuity. This bill would add a financial burden for many organizations on our steering committee, threatening their ability to care for land entrusted to us for the benefit of future generations.

In conclusion, we ask you to remove Section 6 of H.B. 7408, and send a positive signal to land trusts that the many valuable benefits they provide to municipalities are appreciated. We thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony on this important piece of legislation.