

April 29, 2019

Dear Members of the Finance, Revenue and Bonding Committee,

As a member of Old Lyme Land Trust and as a town-appointed representative to Connecticut River Gateway Commission, I strongly oppose Section 1 of SB 1137 and Section 5 of SB 1138.

It is counterproductive to Connecticut's open space commitments to require nonprofits, including land trusts, with "significant" savings accounts, endowments or pension funds to pay into a state "community development account" the equivalent of 25% property tax.

I have seen first-hand over the past twenty years how volunteer leaders and members of multiple local land trusts and land preservation groups in the Lower Connecticut River Valley and Southeastern Connecticut donate their time, work hard and sacrifice to raise funds so these organizations can acquire, manage and maintain crucial parcels of conservation lands and open space in their local communities. They often are competing with commercial developers to acquire and preserve land that should be protected for perpetuity, to protect fragile ecosystems and to provide for passive recreation by current and future generations.

Land trusts are the core of Connecticut communities and their conservation ethos. Taxation will penalize these organizations and their communities in their efforts to set aside funds to achieve their open space goals and to help secure their long-term viability.

Any money transfer scheme by the state threatens the ability of these volunteer organizations to carry out their mission and to stay in existence. These land trusts are responsible for caring for properties and easements in perpetuity pursuant to best management practices (The Land Trust Standards & Practices).

Taxation of land trust and non-profit organization assets would also have a chilling effect on donations by citizens who want their donations to support land conservation and not a state tax.

These proposals in SB 1137 and SB 1138 would divert critical resources from land trusts' ability to acquire and manage open spaces and other natural resources that benefit the quality of life and local economy in their communities.

I urge you to please vote NO on these proposals that would tax land trusts.

Respectfully,

Suzanne Thompson
Chairman, Connecticut River Gateway Commission
Member of Old Lyme Land Trust
Save Oswegatchie Hills Coalition
Old Lyme, CT