Chairperson: Senator Mae Flexer, Representative Daniel Fox

Senators: Haskell, Lesser, Slap, Maroney

Representatives: Blumenthal, France, Haddad, Harding, Phipps, Santiago

Senator Flexer (29th): (Audio starts here) and Elections Committee. We have many individuals signed up to testify today and so first I'm going to call on Representative Gary Turco and Senator Matthew Lesser and the other folks that are coming to testify with them. Thank you and just make sure everyone introduces themselves when they speak. Welcome.

Rep. Turco (27th): Sure, sure. Thank you. I am Gary Turco, State Representative from the 27th district of Newington. Co-Chairs Fox and Flexor, Vice Chairs and Ranking Members not -- Ranking Member France. Thank you so much, and all distinguished members of the GAE Committee, thank you so much for having us. I'm here with a bipartisan coalition; our State Senator Matt Lesser, our Town Planner Craig Miner, Town Counselor Chris Minor, Town Counselor Gail Budrejko and our wonderful Mayor Roy Zartarian and we are here together to express our strong support today for House Bill 7421, AN ACT CONCERNING THE CONVEYANCE OF AN EASEMENT OVER A PARCEL OF STATE LAND IN THE TOWN OF NEWINGTON. I'm going to pass over to my
colleagues because they all have a lot to say and there's a big group of us and I want them to each have a chance to express why this Bill is so important for Newington, for preserving open space and for our residents. Senator Lesser, would you like to start?

SENATOR LESSER (9TH): Yes, thank you Representative Turco and I just want to also echo my support for this legislation. This -- this conveyance has been several years in the works.

SENATOR FLEXER (29TH): Can you please introduce yourself?

SENATOR LESSER (9TH): Oh, yes. Good morning, Senator Flexer. I'm Senator Matt Lesser and --

SENATOR FLEXER (29TH): Thank you, and happy birthday.

SENATOR LESSER (9TH): (Laughing) Thank -- thank you, Senator. I'm just hopeful the Committee doesn't sing for me. But good to see you and Chairman Fox and Representative France and the Members of the GAE Committee as well. So this conveyance has been several years in the works but I think this year what's different about it is that there has been a productive conversation with OPM and I believe with the AIS as well and I'm hopeful that the compromise that we're pushing forward will be -- will be something that's workable for the state and for the town of Newington as well. And with that I'll turn it back to Representative Turco who will introduce -- or Mayor Zartarian, do you want to --
REP. TURCO (27TH): Sure, Mayor Zartarian would like to --

MAYOR ROY ZARTARIAN: Thank you. Good morning Chairpersons Flexer and Fox and members of the Government Administration and Elections Committee. I really appreciate the opportunity to appear before you this morning. For the record, I'm Roy Zartarian, Mayor of Newington. Through Representative Turco's assistance I'm here before you with, as mentioned earlier, bipartisan delegation to request that you act favorably on HB 7421. This measure would convey to Newington a conservation and recreation easement for an 18-acre parcel of the old Cedarcrest Hospital property. This is not a new issue. During the 2018 legislative session this Committee approved SB 502 sponsored by among others, then Representative Gary Byron and former State Representative Tony Guerrero and former Senator Paul Doyle. That Bill would have conveyed 28.8 acres of the Cedarcrest property to the town. Unfortunately as the Bill traveled to the Governor's desk, Newington's allotment shrank to 10 acres. The Bill before you, HB 7421 restores protection of the land that should have been established last year as originally intended.

In a town as simply developed as Newington open space is a rare commodity. Cedar Mountain on which Cedarcrest -- the Cedarcrest property sits is the town's largest undeveloped -- is the town's largest tract of undeveloped natural land. It's a local icon. Newington values this mountain. Please help us preserve this natural resource. Please approve HB 7421. Thank you for your time. Now I'll yield the mic to Counselor Gail Budrejko.
GAIL BUDREJKO: Good morning. My name is Gail Budrejko and I'm a town counselor in Newington as well as the Commissioner on the Open Space Committee and serve as a counsel liaison to town planning and zoning, conservation, environmental quality and the economic development. So I'm asking that you support this conveyance of 18 acres. Dialogue actually on this began in 2013 among DEEP, OLCAM and DAS and at that time DEEP acknowledged that the land had no economic value to the state and wouldn't serve as any useful addition to the state's inventory of parks or wildlife areas. So a recommendation was made for the transfer of 28 acres to Newington and it was finalized in 2014, this recommendation; but it remained dormant until last year when 10 of the 18 acres was transferred to Newington.

Now although the land has no significant economic value it's rich in other ways providing critical habitats for wildlife including a nesting area for the threatened Peregrine falcons. And the land is also unique in that it contains track rock ridge line and track rock ridge lines are noted as one of Connecticut's 12 key habitat areas in wildlife conservation strategies.

Cedar Mountain itself is surrounded by dense and highly-developed communities and it's critical as one of the few local places that can meet wildlife needs for food, water, cover, as well as serve as a resting spot for migrating birds. And Newington as the Mayor said, is a very small town. It's approximately 13 square miles. It's fairly highly developed and it's bordered by heavily traveled Route 9 and the Berlin Turnpike so the wooded
mountain provides a buffer between the Turnpike and the densely populated residential areas helping to mitigate the effects of pollutants and congestion.

Newington residents care deeply about Cedar Mountain; not only for its ecological values but also for its vistas, national landscapes and opportunities for passive recreation. In 2011 Cedar Mountain was threatened by a proposed luxury housing development all along the ridgeline and very, very quickly a grass roots community formed and members young and old, Democrats and Republicans galvanized together and turned out in unprecedented numbers to oppose this development. That plan was stopped but risks to this valuable track rock ridgeline remain. In fact preservation of Cedar Mountain and protecting the western slopes is included in our 2020 plan of conservation and development. And we continue to be mindful of any and all opportunities to preserve and protect the mountain and that's why I'm here today. These 18 acres represents an opportunity for a small but very important acquisition. With continued pressure for economic development, commercial and residential development in the area there might not be many opportunities in the future. So in conclusion, the land has little value to the state but is of great value to the residents of Newington and contributes towards our state of long-term goal of securing and preserving available property along the mountain. Newington is 96 percent developed, having very little open space so please support this conveyance. Thank you.

REP. TURCO (27TH): Counselor Miner, do you have anything to add? All right.
CRAIG MINER: Craig Miner, Town Planner. Just briefly, Cedar Mountain has been in the town's plan of development for many years as a -- as a goal of our town to acquire this open space or at least protect this open space, which this Bill would do. So as the Town Planner I very much support this Bill. Thank you.

REP. TURCO (27TH): Thank you very much for your consideration and we welcome any questions you many have.

SENATOR FLEXER (29TH): Thank you. Thank you all for your testimony. Are there questions or comments from members of the Committee? Representative France.

REP. FRANCE (42ND): Thank you, Madam Chair. Just one question is really dealing with an easement and not a transfer since it's still technically the property we control by the state-to-state could still dispose of it, depending on what the terms of the deal are but granting an easement for Rights of Access as opposed to advocating for the land to be transferred to a land conservancy group, the Avalonia or some other land conservancy group to make -- ensure that there wouldn't be an opportunity down the road. So I'm just curious as to why an easement as opposed to the ladder transfer.

SENATOR LESSER (9TH): Yes, thank you Representative France. That's an excellent question. And because -- I think it concerns the use of other state land that's adjacent to this parcel and because of setback requirements the state I think is hoping to preserve its ability to use that -- that land going forward. So this protects the parcel in
consideration and protect -- and alleviates concerns for the town of Newington for development on this particular parcel that we're asking for, which is the area of the greatest concern at the moment.

CRAIG MINER: And it gives the town -- gives the town the legal ability to defend the open space aspect of it. It's more than just an open space easement. It's a conservation easement so Newington would be in a position to defend it if for some reason efforts were -- were afoot to develop the property.

REP. FRANCE (42ND): Thank you, Representative. Thank you, Madam Chair.

SENATOR FLEXER (29TH): Thank you, Representative. Are there other questions or comments from members of the Committee? Representative Fox.

REP. FOX (148TH): Thank you, Madam Chair. Thank you for appearing today and testifying on the Bill. Briefly Gail, I think you mentioned in your testimony your reference to a 2020 plan of conservation. Can you please just expand on that and how this parcel is included in that or not included?

GAIL BUDREJKO: Yes. All of the threatened development that occurred in you know -- it was actually kind of initiated prior to the finalization of our 2020 plan of conservation and development. And when the GPC saw the numbers of people coming out to public hearings and whatever they realized that this mountain is very important. It is very important to preserve and protect. So a substantial portion of our open space section of the 2020 plan
of conservation and development they included saying that Cedar Mountain is important and we need to preserve and protect. It didn't specify this particular parcel, but it said as much of the mountain as we can, so the residents are very much supportive of this as is TPC and our land use commissions.

REP. FOX (148TH): Thank you very much. Thank you, Madam Chair.

SENATOR FLEXER (29TH): Thank you, Representative. Are there other questions or comments from members of the Committee? Seeing none, thank you all for your testimony this morning. And again, happy birthday. Next we will hear from Senator Slap, Senator Bizzarro, and Representative Demicco.

SENATOR SLAP (5TH): Good morning. Thank you to Senator Flexer and Representative Fox and all the members, Ranking Members of the Planning and Development Committee. I'm going to be very brief and then hand it over to the experts on this topic but we are here to -- to talk as a bipartisan delegation advocating for an Amendment to Special Act No. 15-1, Section 3 by way of Raised Bill Senate 1128. I would say that we are the bipartisan Farmington delegation absent just one person who is actually here as well, Representative Exum, so anyway I wanted to talk to you about a very important issue that's really going to help the economy and town budget and issues that are very important to everybody in Farmington. So with that I'm going to hand it over to my colleague, Representative -- I'm sorry, Senator Bizzarro to further elaborate on why we're all here together.
SENATOR BIZZARRO (6TH): Thank you, Senator Slap.
Good morning. I'd like to thank all of the
distinguished members of this Committee for allowing
us the opportunity to be here this morning and speak
today about this important issue. I'd also like to
warmly welcome the new -- newly elected
Representative Exum to the -- to this Committee.
It's an honor to be here before all of you. We're
here today --

SENATOR FLEXER (29TH): Senator, I'm sorry to
interrupt you. Could you identify yourself?

SENATOR BIZZARRO (6TH): Oh I'm sorry. For the
record, Gennaro Bizzarro, State Senator from the 6th
District. Thank you, Senator Flexer. We are here
today advocating for an Amendment to Special Act 15-1,
Section 3 by way of raised Bill, -- Senate Bill
1128. Special Act -- the Special Act 15-1 has to do
with a parcel of land located on Route 4 in
Farmington's Historic District known as Parson's
Parcel. The Act allowed -- when it was passed,
allowed for the conveyance of that parcel from DOT
to the town of Hart -- of Farmington. The issue
that we have with the Act as it was passed is that
the parcel is contaminated but the way the Special
Act was passed it required that the town of
Farmington pay the fair market value as determined
by two appraisers selected by DOT and those
appraisers are not recognizing that the parcel is in
fact contaminated. So the appraised values have
come back as if the parcel were -- were clean and
also free of any easements and the property is
encumbered by easements as well. So as it stands
right now the parties are handcuffed and they --
Farmington is willing and wants to acquire property
from DOT but their parties are unable to negotiate a fair market value. So this Senate Bill 1128 would attempt to remedy that flaw in the legislation as passed. And with that I'm going to turn it over to my colleague, Representative Demicco for some further remarks and introduction of our members from the Farmington town today. Thank you.

REP. DEMICCO (21ST): Thank you, Senator. Thank you, Senator Flexer and Representative Fox for having us here today. My name is Mike Demicco. I'm the state Representative from the 21st District of Farmington. I don't need to -- don't need to belabor the point. The Special Act that was passed a few years ago as Senator Bizzarro mentioned really ties the hands of both the town and the Department of Transportation. It does not -- the way that it is written, it does not allow for consideration to be given to the contamination as well as the easements so as the Senator -- both Senators pointed out, this legislation that's before you will hopefully remedy that situation. There are people who are much more well versed on this than I am and I will introduce them to you now if I may. So we have Kathy Blonski, who is the Town Manager of the town of Farmington, and we have Nancy Nickerson who is the Town Council Chair in Farmington. And I think they'll be able to provide you with more details with your permission. Thank you.

KATHLEEN BLONSKI: Thank you. Thanks so much for hearing us today. My name is Kathleen Blonski and I am the Town Manager for the Town of Farmington. Joining me today is Nancy Nickerson, whose the Chair of the Farmington Town Council. We ask you to support SB No. 1128, specifically our request to
amend Special Act No. 15-1 Section 3 which was passed in 2015.

Special Act No. 15-1 Section 3 specified that the Commissioner of the Transportation would convey to the Town of Farmington the land acquired from Parsons Properties by State of Connecticut Department of Transportation. The cost of such property would be equal to the fair market value of the property as determined by the average of the appraisals of two independent appraisers selected by the Commissioner, plus the administrative costs of making such conveyance.

This particular parcel of land is located in the historic village center of Farmington and acts as a gateway into our town. The DOT and the Town of Farmington have assessed this property and had -- and it has been determined that numerous brownfield areas of concern exist on the property. The Town of Farmington is committed to purchasing this parcel of land and controlling the redevelopment opportunities that will arise once this property becomes available. Special Act No 15-1 Section 3 does not allow the town to negotiate with DOT and address the cost to cure the various Brownfield areas of concern that exist on this property. Instead, as stated in the Special Act, we must pay the average of the two appraisals. Both appraisals submitted to the Town by the DOT are based on the site as if clean. This Amendment would permit the town of Farmington and the DOT to negotiate a fair market value of the property taking the Brownfield contamination into account.
In summary, the town of Farmington is not asking to repeal the Special Act because this Special Act establishes that the DOT shall convey the parcel to the town. If the Special Act was repealed, the State would follow Connecticut General Statute Section 13a-80 which states that the Commissioner of Transportation may sell, lease or convey. This Special Act ensures that the DOT shall convey the parcel to the town. This will ensure the town’s control and development of our most important Gateway. The town of Farmington understands that the DOT must sell the property to the town at the market value, but the town needs the ability to negotiate with the DOT of what the market value is. Market value must be adjusted based on what the cleanup costs will be. By amending the Special Act and incorporating Connecticut General Statute Section 3-14b this will enable the town and the DOT to follow an established procedure and allows the town to negotiate with the DOT and will still guarantee that the DOT will convey the property to the town of Farmington based on a negotiated price.

The town of Farmington has hired a Licensed Environmental Professional and have met with representatives from the Connecticut Department of Energy & Environmental Protection (DEEP) to explore how to proceed should the town purchase the property.

In conclusion, by passing this amendment the town of Farmington will have the ability to purchase a vacant underutilized parcel of land with environmental contaminants, partner with a private developer, remediate the contaminants and develop a project that will contribute to the overall
revitalization of our Village Center. I urge you to consider our request to pass this Amendment. Thank you for your consideration; and I now turn it over to Nancy Nickerson.

NANCY NICKERSON:  Good morning. Representative Fox, Senator Flexer and members of the Government Administration and Elections Committee, my name is Nancy Nickerson and I am the Chairperson of the Farmington Town Council. I fully support Senate Bill No. 1128-AN ACT AMENDING A CONVEYANCE OF A PARCEL OF STATE LAND IN THE TOWN OF FARMINGTON. The Parson’s property is a significant parcel in the heart of our Farmington Village Center. Over the past four years our Farmington Village Center has been greatly impacted by a major roadway improvement project on Route 4. This project caused the small businesses and residents who live and travel through Route 4 to endure construction delays and disruptions throughout the road project. However, we valued these improvements because our town centers are so important to us and we knew that this road project would improve Route 4 and begin the revitalization of our town center.

To address the revitalization of our Gateways, the Town Council established the Gateway Committee. In an effort to engage the community, this committee conducted charettes and planning meetings to solicit the community’s input and determine the future of this important area of town. In my six years as Chair of the Council, I have yet to see the community more engaged and vested in any project in the town. We had over 300 residents attend a three-day charrette and over 150 residents attend a community meeting to review and discuss the final
Farmington Center Report. Throughout the planning process, it was very clear that the revitalization of Farmington Village Center is of upmost importance to our community in Farmington.

I urge you to support this Amendment so that the Town of Farmington has the necessary tools to purchase the Parson’s property and continue the revitalization of our Farmington Village Center. We appreciate your consideration today. Thank you very much.

SENATOR FLEXER (29TH): Thank you. Thank you for your testimony. Are there questions or comments from the members of the Committee? Representative France.

REP. FRANCE (42ND): Thank you, Madam Chair. Just one question. You said you hired a Licensed Environmental Professional. Do you have any insight yet into the scope of the environmental concerns that are on the property? Have they done any kind of analysis as a preliminary basis?

KATHLEEN BLONSKI: Phase 1 has been done. I think a start of Phase 2 has been done. There -- again, I'm not an environmental person but the first report was 1600 pages so there is quite a bit of environmental concerns. It was a car dealership but we are working to try to figure out what -- how much environmental concerns we have but we are willing to do that.

REP. FRANCE (42ND): All right, thank you. Thank you, Madam Chair.
SENATOR FLEXER (29TH): Thank you, Representative. Are there other questions or comments from members of the Committee? Representative Fox.

REP. FOX (148TH): Thank you, Madam Chair. Just a brief -- Ms. Nickerson, you made reference to the Gateway Committee. That's still ongoing?

NANCY NICKERSON: Yes. Yes, it is ongoing. We are in the process of -- this is just part of the process that we're going through right now to try to revitalize that center but this is a critical piece for us to move forward with that whole area and we have various committees that have, in addition to the Center Committee, various subcommittees that are looking at a lot of different projects in the area, so.

REP. FOX (148TH): So this piece is a proponent or as a component of larger plans, is that what you're saying?

NANCY NICKERSON: Yes.

REP. FOX (148TH): Just not being entirely familiar with the town of Farmington, I apologize for that, approx. -- where location wise, this is the center of the town?

KATHLEEN BLONSKI: If you -- if you come down Route 4 right off of 84, it used to be the Parson's Curve and the Parson site was right there, so that's the start of our study area and that is the parcel on your right if you're coming through -- that's the Parson site that we're looking into. So then you come down and then there's Route 4 and Route 10 and the Porters is there, this is the whole village area that we're talking about.
REP. FOX (148TH): And the center parcel is a little under -- just under 3 acres, correct? It's a relatively small piece in comparison?

NANCY NICKERSON: Yes.

REP. FOX (148TH): Okay. Thank you very much.

SENATOR FLEXER (29TH): Thank you, Representative. Are there other questions or comments from members of the Committee? I have one question. We just received a copy of the testimony from the Department of Transportation and their testimony says that the revised language to include that the property be sold in accordance with statute is unnecessary as the Department can sell the property to the municipality pursuant to other sections of the statute. Do you agree with that?

KATHLEEN BLONSKI: My understanding, and this is what to me is a little bit confusing; if you real Connecticut General Statute 13a-80, and that's my understanding for where it starts from, it says may. And that's what our concern is. And then I -- my understanding is that it then moves to Section 1314-b which then does the process. Our concern is the town is that in 13a-80 it says may and that's what they're -- the DOT is working off of until they work off of 1314b. So we would like to ensure that it's shall, and to do that that's our understanding that we have to have the Special Act, and then once we're sure we want to use that -- the already established procedure, 13-14-b which actually allows the state to negotiate with the town and it's an established procedure.
SENATOR FLEXER (29TH): So are you concerned that the department would not want -- would choose not to sell you the property?

KATHLEEN BLONSKI: That could happen, yeah.

SENATOR FLEXER (29TH): Okay. Thank you very much. Are there other questions or comments? Thank you again for your testimony this morning. Next is Senator Anwar.

SENATOR ANWAR (3RD): Good morning.

SENATOR FLEXER (29TH): Good morning. Welcome.

SENATOR ANWAR (3RD): Honorable Co-Chairs Senator Flexer, Representative Fox, and members of the Government Administration Elections Committee, my name is Saud Anwar. I'm currently serving as the Senator for the third --

SENATOR FLEXER (29TH): Excuse me, Senator. If I could ask people in the room to be respectful of the people who are now testifying, thank you. I apologize for interrupting.

SENATOR ANWAR (3RD): My name is Suad Anwar. I'm currently serving as the Senator for the Third Senatorial District. I am with my colleagues and my friends. Towards my right is the -- Selectman Bob Maynard for East Windsor and I have Bob Lyke who is a member of Economic Development Commission for East Windsor. I'm going to speak about Bill, Senate Bill 1124. This is about the land conveyance for East Windsor. Now it is my understanding that this facility is currently being used as a north campus of Albert J. Solnit Children's Center, a psychiatric treatment facility for adolescent males between the
ages of 13 and 17 and this is operated by the Department of Children and Families. Now this is an active facility and we'll probably hear a little bit more from First Selectman Bob Maynard about how we are having this conversation this morning.

Because this is an active facility obviously it is providing care to children at this time but our -- our hope is that if there is for one reason or the other, this facility -- this space is available, East Windsor should be looked at as the town to be able to receive this. So with that I'm going to yield the remaining part of my conversation to my friends and colleagues.

BOB MAYNARD: Good morning Senator Flexer and Representative Fox, distinguished members of the Government Administration and Elections Committee. Is this on? In March of this year, I filled out a Connecticut General Assembly Conveyance form. That was sent to me by the Legislature -- Legislative Commissioner's Office and returned it to the Chief Legislative Attorney. The questionnaire expressed East Windsor’s interest in obtaining the state property located at 36 Gardner Street in the Warehouse Point section of East Windsor. The State property is located -- where the state property is located is the Department of Families and Children’s, as Anwar said, and is the Solnit Campus North. To quote and as Anwar also said, it's Psychiatric Treatment Facility for ages between the -- males between the age of 13 and 17 with complex psychiatric needs. When I filled out the questionnaire I spoke with David Berry at the DCF and made DCF aware that we were interested in the property and we were filling out questionnaire. The
reason I filled out the questionnaire was to make the State of Connecticut aware that the town of East Windsor is interested in this property. Considering the state’s financial position, as a cost savings, I thought at some point the state might consider consolidating the Solnit North Campus with the Solnit South Campus in Middletown. If and when this consolidation is considered, I would like East Windsor’s interest in the property to be known.

Also, I would like to add, point out that I appreciate the work being done at the North Campus of the Solnit facilities and I support the treatment they are providing to the state residents. They are good neighbors and as long as the state feels that it is needed for the Albert J Solnit North Campus to remain in our town, East Windsor we will provide the work -- and work with the state to provide for the facility.

And in conclusion I would say that I appreciate the Government, Administration and Elections Committee recognizing and exploring the interest in -- that East Windsor has in the property at 36 Gardner Street. Thank you.

BOB LYKE: Good morning, and thank you, Madam Chairman and rest of the Committee. I'm Bob Lyke, former Selectman from the town of East Windsor and presently representing the Economic Development Commission with the same caveat as my bipartisan colleagues, Senator Anwar and First Selectman Maynard have in regards to complete agreement with the DCF about what's best for the children and clients presently being treated there. If given the opportunity to have this land conveyed there's a
unique situation that we have in town that we could make good use of it. One is that we have two Town Halls. One is the main Town Hall that shares the same property with the Broadbrook East Windsor Elementary School System and they share parking lots and the property is separated only by a main road that goes through the center of that side of town that has terrible congestion that creates a safety problem during the bus terms -- transfer students back and forth to the school there. The other is that we only have a small meeting room in that main Town Hall and we often have to adjourn to one of the other schools when we have a good turnout for a town meeting or a hearing.

The other building that we have is called the Town Hall Annex and it houses both the police department with a lockup facility and various other offices such as community services. As the town's Veterans Service Officer in that same building over there, I have a lot of confidential HIPPA information, financial information that I have to interview clients with in the same office that houses the Visiting Nurses Association. So perhaps in the long run if this is to happen we have good ideas of having a public safety complex that houses the central communication system for First Responders. We could perhaps close the road between the Broadbrook Elementary School and the Town Hall and make that one school complex. And in closing I would say that the centralized municipal town government being under one roof under the theme of the municipal leaders and government officials there would be good not only for a spirit of décor but it would be convenient location for potential
developers to get off and on. So I urge you to support and passage of this Bill again, if in agreement with the DCR. Thank you.

SENATOR FLEXER (29TH): Thank you. Thank you for your testimony. If I could just ask a quick clarifying question. So you're saying the town would like this property if one day DCF is not using it, but you recognize that DCF is using it right now.

BOB MAYNARD: That's correct. And we would support and continue to support and we do support and continue to support that facility in our town. There -- and they've been pretty conscientious about that. Some people have wandered off the campus and caused problems because it is in a neighborhood, but of late it's been very secure and we appreciate what they're doing.

SENATOR FLEXER (29TH): Okay.

SENATOR ANWAR (3RD): When we actually had this Bill we were not aware of the functionality of this and since then we've had a chance to talk to DCF and are now aware of the fact that this is actually providing care to vulnerable children and we want to make sure that they're protected but as we live in an era where consolidations are happening in some aspects of care, if that was to happen the town would want opportunity to be able to take care of their needs at that point.

SENATOR FLEXER (29TH): Okay. Thank you. Are there questions from members of the Committee? Representative Mastrofrancesco.
REP. MASTROFRANCESCO (80TH): Thank you, Madam Chair. Good morning and welcome. Thank you for coming today. Can you tell me if based on your charter or your ordinance, is public input required for the town to purchase property? Has there -- have there -- has there been any public hearing or feedback from the community as to their agreement with this?

BOB MAYNARD: This -- we -- as I said, submitted this questionnaire just to put us on the radar. We didn't want it to be done without contacting us. There has been no really public hearing in this regard. We're not in a -- we would like to work with the state and with the DCF when -- if a consolidation does start to occur and that's really what we're about.

REP. MASTROFRANCESCO (80TH): Thank you. And is it required though per your ordinance or your charter that a public hearing be held?

BOB MAYNARD: Yes. If we're going to acquire property it would be required that a public hearing be held.

REP. MASTROFRANCESCO (80TH): Prior to the --

BOB MAYNARD: Prior to -- and in fact we'd have to have a town meeting vote on the acquiring of property. So it would be passed by the legislative body of the town.

REP. MASTROFRANCESCO (80TH): So at this point you're just inquiring --

BOB MAYNARD: Yes.
REP. MASTROFRANCESCO (80TH): And if the state is interested and then it will go through -- then you would hold a public hearing again before anything is done?

BOB MAYNARD: Yes.

REP. MASTROFRANCESCO (80TH): Perfect. Thank you very much for your testimony today

SENATOR FLEXER (29TH): Thank you, Representative. Are there other questions or comments from members of the Committee? Seeing none, thank you again for your testimony this morning. Next is Ken Mysogland from DCF.

KEN MYSOGLAND: Good morning. My name is Ken Mysogland. I'm currently the Bureau Chief for External Affairs for the Department of Children and Families, so good morning to Senator Flexor, Representative Fox, Representative France, and the distinguished members of the GAE Committee. I am testifying this morning and actually reading the testimony on behalf of Commissioner Vanessa Dorantes who unfortunately is out of state for the next couple of days.

The Department of Children and Families (DCF) submits this testimony to express our concern about Senate Bill 1124, which conveys our Solnit North campus to the Town of East Windsor, and Senate Bill 1126, which conveys the High Meadows campus to the Town of Hamden.

The North Campus of the Albert J. Solnit Center -- Children’s Center in East Windsor is certified as a Psychiatric Residential Treatment Facility by the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services. The
Department converted the Solnit North facility to a PRTF for adolescent males in 2013. Prior to this program change, all adolescent males needing this level of care had to be treated out of state.

The campus has 38 beds that are currently being used to house and treat youths who have complex behavioral health needs. Conveyance of the property to East Windsor would result in the Department having to disrupt the youths’ clinical treatment because they would need to be relocated to one or more alternate settings. At this time, there is no other facility maintained by DCF that is able to provide the appropriate services for these youth.

It should also be noted that the department has also expended significant funds in recent months for anti-ligature solutions and other facility renovations at Solnit North. Due to the facility’s status as a PRTF, the state is reimbursed by federal government for the eligible services provided at this site. The revenue generated at this site in fiscal year 2017 was approximately $19 million. Direct operational costs of DCF in the same fiscal year for the facility was approximately $12.4 million.

Closure of Solnit North would result in the residents being transferred into facilities located out of state because in-state capacity is not available at this time. The cost to support a placement in these private facilities is estimated at approximately $800 per day, or about $11 million annually. Federal revenues would also be expected to decline.
The department strongly encourages the Committee to not act favorably on SB 1124 and to allow DCF to maintain the Solnit North campus as a PRTF where youths who are in need of behavioral health treatment can continue to receive needed services in-state, closer to their families. Lastly, the High Meadows campus in Hamden consists of approximately 50 acres. The property has been valued at over $6.3 million by the Town of Hamden.

The Department thanks the Committee for consideration of this testimony.

SENATOR FLEXER (29TH): Thank you for your testimony. Are there questions from members of the Committee? Representative France.

REP. FRANCE (42ND): Thank you, Madam Chair and thank you for coming to give this testimony and DCF's perspective. The town it appears is looking if -- if there is a consolidation at future point. Does DCF have any plans in the near future or even considering that down the road as a potential to this facility?

KEN MYSOGLAND: So Representative, currently we do not have plans to consolidate Solnit North and Solnit South. We did quickly meet with the representatives of the town before today's testimony and their position is certainly understood regarding their interest, but the honest interest is there are no current plans for any consolidation.

REP. FRANCE (42ND): Thank you for that, and I presumed that was the case. I guess the question -- followup question would be, and I know it's catching you on the spot, if there was a consolidation, do
you see an opportunity for reduced cost-provided services that we're providing? I certainly understand the strong desire not to place people out of state to see the cost to that and the benefit to having them being cared for in the state, but is there -- has there been looked at, just I guess a general facility analysis and if this was a part of that to ensure that we are providing the most cost-effective to taxpayers for the treatment that we need to provide?

KEY MYSOGLAND: Sure. I think it's best to say that the reason why the -- Solnit North was put into place in 2013 is because we realized the great need we had that lacked other in-state beds therefore Solnit North was created. And it is -- has been an excellent facility and served the needs of this very high end population of adolescent males very well. I can also tell you that with the department, we are always looking at ways to not only consolidate perhaps facilities or services or staffing or regional offices to ensure that the population that we serve is served the best and the most cost effective way, and especially with youth that are in -- out of home placement, to ensure they are as close as possible to their families. So to connect the two questions, we think right now the need is without question here, for this population of young men. The facility at Solnit North is there for very specific reasons, developed in 2013. But again you never know what the future holds and we're very attuned to the individuals from the town East Windsor and their interests if in fact the property ever became open.
REP. FRANCE (42ND): Thank you for that explanation. A final question. Is there -- the naming, you have Solnit North and Solnit South, is there a connection between those or was it just a -- was there some intention with that naming convention, in otherward there's a connection between the two facilities as far as the services provided or was it just geographic or was it -- I guess how was the naming, 'cause that was one of the statements from the last people giving public testimony was you know, consolidate north into south. So is there a connection between the two facilities or was it just a naming convention I guess when the facility was opened?

KEN MYSOGLAND: Representative, as best as I can understand about the history there I believe around 2011 we viewed North and South as one facility ie. Changed the name from Riverview, which is now Solnit South, and I believe either Warepoint or Connecticut Children's Center CCP, which is now Solnit North. So the thought was have a PRTF for males in Solnit North, a PRTF for females in Solnit South and we cannot consolidate them due to a number of reasons. But my understanding that the history on the name and why the same name applies but just the nuance North and South I believe what I just indicated is the best interest.

I also wanted to make sure I clarify this, that Solnit North actually operates about $6.4 million positively on the revenue end based on what it costs and then in relation to the reimbursement that the department receives for the care of the youth.
REP. FRANCE (42ND): Thank you very much. Thank you, Madam Chair.

SENATOR FLEXER (29TH): Thank you, Representative. Are there other questions or comments from member of the Committee? Representative Mastrofrancesco.

REP. MASTROFRANCESCO (80TH): Thank you, Madam Chair. Thank you for coming today. I just wanted a little clarification being new on the Committee.

KEN MYSOGLAND: Sure.

REP. MASTROFRANCESCO (80TH): And just the process so if I'm to understand correctly, 1124 for East Windsor and then you also have a facility in Hamden; is that correct?

KEN MYSOGLAND: Correct. The facility in Hamden was formally known as High Meadows and that facility was closed, I believe well over 15 years ago and currently the Department of Children and Families does not operate any facility on that property.

REP. MASTROFRANCESCO (80TH): Okay. Just the one for East Windsor?

KEN MYSOGLAND: Correct.

REP. MASTROFRANCESCO (80TH): I'm just curious. Was there any type of conversation or indication to the town of East Windsor that that property may become available at some point? I mean it's been there for a while. I would think a town would not even think of inquiring about purchasing unless maybe they heard a rumor that DCF may move, I mean -- and you may not even be able to answer this question. I'm just asking, how did it all come about? I mean your -- there's a facility there with children in there.
KEN MYSOGLAND: Not sure how the information came to them that it potentially could be available. We're not sure. But again, we did have a nice albeit quick conversation with the town officials before we started today's hearing and we certainly understand their position that if it did become available they would like, for lack of a better term, right of first refusal. We plan to follow up with them in the future if there's any plans for consolidation, but how they came to believe it would potentially be open I -- I'm not -- I don't know.

REP. MASTROFRANCESCO (80TH): And I don't mean to put you on the spot.

KEN MYSOGLAND: That's okay.

REP. MASTROFRANCESCO (80TH): I assumed you wouldn't be able to answer that question but I didn't know if you had conversation and I was just curious how -- I mean it's been there for quite a while. But the facility in Hamden is vacant; is that correct?

KEN MYSOGLAND: Correct. It is -- it has been vacant for a number of years, yes.

REP. MASTROFRANCESCO (80TH): Okay. Thank you very much for answering my questions. I appreciate it.

SENATOR FLEXER (29TH): Thank you, Representative. Are there other questions or comments from members of the Committee? Seeing none, thank you for your testimony. Next is Amy Paterson.

AMY PATERSON: I don't know if I'll ever get used to these chairs. Thank you, Senator Flexer, Representative Fox and members of the Government Administration and Elections Committee. For the
record, my name is Amy Blaymore Paterson and I'm the Executive Director of the Connecticut Land Conservation Council or CLCC. We are the statewide umbrella organization for Connecticut's Land Conservation Community including its 137 or so land trusts. I want to thank you for this opportunity to present our testimony today. And it's really comments with respect to all of the Conveyance Bills that are listed on your agenda.

I did submit written testimony. It's rather short as will be my oral testimony here just to summarize. We have three overarching observations with respect to all of the Conveyance Bills listed. The first is with respect to the oversight of the State Properties Review Board. We would recommend that all of the Conveyance Bills that come before you be reviewed by the Review Board and that really is to stay in line with the goal of transparency and comprehensiveness that is inherent now in this process that has been to our delight for -- through the Constitutional Amendment giving us individual public hearings and an opportunity to scrutinize each individual Bill. And so to that end, we would hope that the Review Board would do the same and we did note that two of the Bills are not subject to that review.

Similarly with respect to a comprehensive and transparent look at these proposals, we would also ask that more detail if possible be placed into the Bills with respect to their intended use. And in my written testimony I had used the Chesser Conveyance as an example, that's SB 1123. That is one where over 47 acres of land has been proposed. We looked at those properties, we got some information and it
turns out that there are significant wetlands on there and much of the area is an aquifer protection zone, and so with that information up front I think it would be helpful for the public to know within the context of the Bill what the end use of that property is going to be if possible. Just having the economic development purpose is so broad, it's very hard to know. And if a property has significant resources it gives this Committee the opportunity to ask additional questions and perhaps place other conditions in the Bill that would relate to the special features of that property.

And finally, just understanding how consideration is determined. When we note and looking at this as the public does that in some cases the conveyances are for no cost and some cases they're for administrative costs only and in some cases they're for the fair market value and so it would be helpful to understand why the system is set up that way. Those are our three over arching -- over arching comments with respect to the process. I will say overall we're just so happy to be here seeing that this new process is moving forward and we're happy to work with you on improving that as well.

SENATOR FLEXER (29TH): Thank you. Thank you for your testimony. Are there questions or comments from members of the Committee? Representative Fox.

REP. FOX (148TH): Thank you for being here today. Just a very quick question. Can you just give me a brief, better understanding of the State Properties Review Board process?

AMY PATERSON: Yes. And actually I reminded myself as that as well. I went to the statute -- or I went
to their website and I sited that in the footnote of my testimony so if you want to look, it starts with their mission statement and so I'll just read the quote of what -- of what they do. But overall it's just an oversight. It's an additional kind of protection that would be looking at some of the details to make sure that the state is entering into a good business deal. And so as I have quoted here, it is, and this is their mission: To ensure that transactions are done in a prudent business-like manner, that costs are reasonable and that proposals are in compliance with state laws, regulations and procedures.

REP. FOX (148TH): And thank you for that. When would you recommend that that process take place in terms of the new conveyance process?

AMY PATERSON: When?

REP. FOX (148TH): Yes.

AMY PATERSON: Well, that's a really good question. I mean I think that the State Property Review Board is in all but again two of these, and so I think it would be part of the review process once these proposals go through you. It would go to them, and that's a condition of them -- the -- the individual Bill being -- moving forward, I would think. And so any information I would suspect would come back to you if there was a problem. But I'm not really, you know, I would say that it wouldn't make sense necessarily to go to the Property Review Board if you haven't approved the Bill. So you approve it, but it's conditional upon a number of things that are enumerated in the Bill and one of those would be
the State Property Review Board review of the -- of the proposal.

REP. FOX (148TH): Okay. Thank you very much for your time and testimony.

SENATOR FLEXER (29TH): Thank you, Representative. I just have one followup question. Who makes up that board?

AMY PATERSON: I did look at that too. There are various appointees.

SENATOR FLEXER (29TH): Are there executive and legislative or just executive?

AMY PATERSON: You know I can't answer that question, I'm sorry.

SENATOR FLEXER (29TH): I'm sorry I put you on the spot.

AMY PATERSON: No, no, it's fine but I just can't answer that question off the top of my head. I did actually look at that yesterday but I don't remember because I wasn't thinking about that aspect of it.

SENATOR FLEXER (29TH): Okay. Any other questions or comments? Thank you again for your testimony.

AMY PATERSON: And I'm followed by Eric Hammerling who will maybe be able to answer that question for you as well.

SENATOR FLEXER (29TH): Okay, great. Thank you. Next as Amy said is Eric Hammerling.

ERIC HAMMERLING: Good afternoon. My name is Eric Hammerling. I'm the Executive Director of the Connecticut Forest and Park Association. And I
always find these hearings on conveyances to be extremely interesting and I learn a lot every time. Some surprises. I think some of you may have been surprised today. Similar to Amy Paterson's testimony I'm going to make some over arching comments on various conveyances before you but I'd be happy to respond to specific questions on any of them.

One thing that didn't occur to me until today in listening to some of the testimony was that it would be really helpful since most of the Bills come from questionnaires that are filled out by municipalities and legislatures to kind of describe proposals. It would be helpful to see those publicly before (laughing) before the public hearing. I think that would be a really useful guide so that -- that people could have insights into the details of these proposals and that some proposals that may not even be proposals but a first right of refusal type conversation, perhaps that doesn't even need to come here. And I think also the question that you asked of Amy Paterson on the State Properties Review Board is a very, very good one and astute one in terms of when things should come to the State Properties Review Board. The way that it functions normally and I agree with Amy's comments that it should always happen is that at the end of the process, and I think that if it did happen earlier in the process, perhaps even before it came to you, that would actually ensure that when you make your decision at this Committee level you have all of those responsible review from their perspective in your hands to make the best decision possible.
A couple of other recommendations similarly, we think it's always useful to have an intended use of a conveyance to be included in the Bill language. That's all about transparency and the process. And then you know, finally though it's not the core focus of our mission, we do have concerns with transferring state assets of significant appraised value out of state ownership without also providing a clearly articulated benefit to the state. Our estimate -- our estimate is that the combined value of the properties being discussed today is in the vicinity of $25 million and that's real money that could benefit land acquisition and management programs at DEEP, many other programs that you will have in front of you in terms of a budget with the challenges we have in front of us.

So with that, I thank you for holding his public hearing, for your commitment to transparency and we look forward to working with you as things move forward. Thank you.

SENATOR FLEXER (29TH): Thank you. Thank you for your testimony. Are there questions or comments from members of the Committee? Representative Mastrofrancesco.

REP. MASTROFRANCESCO (80TH): Thank you, Madam Chair. Thank you very much for your testimony. I'm just curious of the process you had mentioned in here, that the conveyances really should go through the State Properties Review Board. Has that been done in the past?

ERIC HAMMERLING: Most that I'm aware of do go through the State Properties Review Board at the end. After you have -- all of the Bills usually
have that last paragraph of review by the State Properties Review Board and you know, as its constructed, it's been you know, mostly a way to catch errors that might have been made. Things that might be on the land records that perhaps didn't come before you in making the decision. For example, if there's an existing easement or a lien or something on the property records, those do get reviewed by the Properties Review Board before a conveyance is finalized though you know 99 percent probably that are approved by the Committee go through.

REP. MASTROFRANCESCO (80TH): And then what happens from there?

ERIC HAMMERLING: Then the final -- finalization of the conveyance happens as the land actually transfers from the state to the ultimate end user.

REP. MASTROFRANCESCO (80TH): So if you find a problem or something that's an eye opener on that there's no recourse; would that be correct? I mean it would -- (crosstalk) if the Committee approves it?

ERIC HAMMERLING: Yeah, it -- it might be that -- you're absolutely right. If there were a mistake that was found by the State Properties Review Board it's possible that they might delay the project until the next legislative session so that if there was something that needed to be fixed, it could be brought to your attention then. You know one thing though on the structure of the State Properties Review Board, somehow magically this information appeared in front of me in terms of the organizational structure. There are six members
appointed on a bipartisan basis. Three appointed by the Speaker of the House and President Pro Tem, three appointed by the Minority Leader of the House and the Minority Leader of the Senate so it's purely legislative body.

REP. MASTROFRANCESCO (80TH): Thank you. I guess just a comment for me it probably would make sense if the Board reviews it then it comes before the Committee so we have all the information. It seems to make more sense as opposed to the other way around, but I appreciate your answers. Thank you very much.

ERIC HAMMERLING: Sure. And I would hope that that would improve the quality of the proposals that come to you as well as you know, your confidence that what is in front of you is the full picture.

SENATOR FLEXER (29TH): Thank you, Representative. Are there other questions or comments from the members of the Committee? Seeing none, thank you very much.

ERIC HAMMERLING: Thank you.

SENATOR FLEXER (29TH): Next is McKenzie Denuck. Is McKenzie here? All right. And Bob Lyke. Is Bob Lyke here? McKenzie or Bob? Final call. You're the last two people on our list today. McKenzie and Bob, last call. All right, well since they're not here, thank you everyone for your testimony today. Thank all the members for their participation. A special welcome to Representative Exum. Welcome to our Committee and welcome to the General Assembly. We're glad to have you. And with that, I will declare this public hearing adjourned.