Bill No.: SB-590
Title: AN ACT CONCERNING THE SELECTION OF CATERERS FOR INDIVIDUALS WHO RENT STATE-OWNED VENUES.
Vote Date: 3/8/2019
Vote Action: Joint Favorable Substitute
PH Date: 3/1/2019
File No.: 127

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SPONSORS OF BILL:

Sen. Catherine A. Osten, 19th Dist.
Rep. Kevin Ryan, 139th Dist.

REASONS FOR BILL:

Existing regulations requires the use of caterer’s on DEEP’s pre-approved caterer list for events held at certain venues in state parks. However, an instance occurred when an individual was unable to secure a caterer of her choosing when renting a venue at Rocky Neck State Park for her wedding. In this case, the individual had already submitted a large non-refundable deposit at the park, and was forced to move her wedding to a different location because the Department of Energy and Environmental Protection (DEEP) did not permit the restaurant to offer catering services. The bill seeks to remedy similar situations by allowing a person renting a venue at a state park or facility to use a caterer of his or her choosing and long as the caterer has a contract with DEEP or provides DEEP with information, required by the commissioner for permitting, twelve months before the rental venue date.

Substitute Language – LCO No. 5710
The original draft of the bill would allow any person who rents a venue at a state park or other facility to utilize the services of any caterer. Testimony shared with the committee explained that only two facilities require caterer’s to be on DEEP’s pre-approved caterer’s list – the Eolia mansion at Harkness Memorial State Park and the Ellie Mitchell Pavilion at Rocky Neck State Park. Such requirements are necessary because those facilities are historic sites listed on the National Register of Historic Places. Substitute language requires that any caterer not on the pre-approved caterer list provide information required for approval to DEEP for approval twelve months in advance of the rental date.
RESPONSE FROM ADMINISTRATION/AGENCY:

Katie S. Dykes, Commissioner, Department of Energy and Environmental Protection (DEEP): Opposes the bill. There are only two locations where renters are required to select from a list of pre-approved caterers, Eolia mansion at Harkness memorial State Park and Ellie Mitchell Pavilion at Rocky Neck State Park. This bill will eliminate the agency’s ability to assure the protection of these two historic state park buildings. These historic buildings are on the National Register of Historic Places and are very different from typical catering venues. These buildings do not contain a kitchen or preparation space, require heating and cooling equipment, and are required to have specific insurance policies in place.

NATURE AND SOURCES OF SUPPORT:

Senator Cathy Osten, 19th Senate Dist.: Shared testimony of a constituent who was unable to secure the catering services of Olde Tymes Restaurant for her wedding at Rocky Neck State Park. DEEP refused to permit the restaurant and the constituent was forced to move her wedding to another location after placing a large, non-refundable deposit at the state park.

NATURE AND SOURCES OF OPPOSITION:

Chris and Kelly Callahan: Shared personal testimony as volunteers at venues that require pre-approved caterers for events. Current regulations work to select the best caterer choices for each venue. It is in the best interest to respect and protect historic venues.

Eileen Grant, Co-President, Friends of CT State Parks: There are complex logistics involved with the Mansion Rental Program at Harkness memorial State Park. The approved caterers list for Harkness State Park is opened every few years for caterers through an open, thorough, and transparent Request for Proposal (RFP) process. There is no working kitchen at Harkness State Park, all equipment and food must be brought and choreographed on the park grounds. Additionally, other premier public and private wedding venues near the park have a preferred/restricted caterers list.

Eric Hammerling, Executive Director, Connecticut Forest & Park Association (CFPA): CFPA shred testimony that DEEP should be responsible for the determination of caterer’s on a pre-approved list for the following reasons: (1) caterers have to be adequately capitalized and properly insured to protect the state’s interests if there are damages, (2) the state has great interest in ensuring that a vendor is “adequate to the task at hand,” (3) state facilities that rent out space for events are historic structures, (4) sites like Harnkess Memorial State Parks want to ensure that visitors have high quality experiences and want high ratings for their services on online review sites like Yelp, and (5) all caterers have the opportunity to submit bids when the catering contract is open every few years.

Reported by: Steve Smith / Ussawin R. Bumpen  Date: 3/29/2019