



**STATE OF CONNECTICUT**  
**DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE**  
Office of the Commissioner



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**ENVIRONMENT COMMITTEE PUBLIC HEARING**  
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**COMMISSIONER BRYAN P. HURLBURT**  
**HB 6441: AN ACT CONCERNING CLIMATE CHANGE ADAPTATION**

Senator Cohen, Representative Gresko, Senator Miner, Representative Harding, and honorable members of the Environment Committee. Thank you for the opportunity to testify on the bills before you today. For the record, my name is Bryan Hurlburt, the Commissioner of the Department of Agriculture.

In September of 2019, Governor Lamont issued Executive Order 3, which rejuvenated the Governor's Council on Climate Change (GC3) and expanded its scope and responsibilities to include both mitigation of carbon emissions and climate change adaptation and resilience as follows: "the Council shall monitor and report on the state's progress on the implementation of carbon mitigation strategies, as well as on the development and implementation of adaptation strategies to assess and prepare for the impacts of climate change in areas such as infrastructure, agriculture, natural resources, and public health."

The Working and Natural Lands Working Group evaluated the role of nature-based solutions (e.g., scaling up the preservation and restoration of forests and coastal wetlands, green and natural infrastructure, agricultural lands) in climate change mitigation and adaptation and how to best incorporate the economic, social, and environmental co-benefits of these solutions into Connecticut's climate change planning strategies.

Over the course of 2020, the Agriculture/Soils Sub Working Group worked diligently with farmers and agricultural producers throughout Connecticut and surrounding New England states to discuss climate change related issues surrounding agriculture and soils. Connecticut farm operations account for over 380,000 acres, totaling more than 5,500 farms. Despite its small size, Connecticut offers a long growing season with a relatively mild climate. In addition, four seasons growing with greenhouses offers increased opportunities to expand the over \$4 billion agricultural contribution to Connecticut's economy each year.

I'd like to take a moment to thank the 16 members of the Agriculture/Soils Working Group who ensured that agriculture and soil health had a seat at the table when it came to climate change

conversations. They navigated tough conversations and activism while their industries were simultaneously dealing with the COVID-19 pandemic. Thank you.

The impacts of climate change are creating both challenges and opportunities for Connecticut agriculture and consumers. The variables in rainfall, frost-free periods, temperature, snowfall, and severe weather events are major challenges. The state will have a longer, warmer growing season that will favor increased production, especially of specialty crops such as fruits and vegetables. An overall wetter climate, with short term droughts, will make water management a challenge. Longer warmer growing seasons and globalization will bring new pests and diseases that will require careful management, and increased research and support from the UCONN College of Agriculture, Health and Natural Resources and the Connecticut Agricultural Experiment Station. Connecticut, and the Northeast, will be one of the few parts of the U.S. with a climate suitable for both people and agriculture. It will require farmers to continue to innovate in their production methods, infrastructure, marketing, and processing. Consumers will need greater awareness of these challenges, and to appreciate the contributions to local food security and economic diversity that farms bring to the state. This also requires our municipalities to allow the flexibility and resources needed to support them.

The Near-Term recommendations from the Agriculture/Soils Working Group were to:

- **Reduce conversion of Prime and Important Farmland Soils, active agricultural land, forest land, and other soil landscapes** that provide critical ecosystem functions and values/ goods and services such as groundwater recharge/discharge, protection of headwaters of cold-water streams, public water supply watersheds, floodplains and riparian areas, wetlands and wetland hydrology, support special habitats and migration corridors for species.
- **Increase the adoption of on-farm energy production and reduce on farm energy usage** through enhancing energy efficiency, renewable energy production, and renewable natural gas from anaerobic digestion, and composting.
- **Strengthen land use planning tools for agriculture** through a more regional approach and updating and streamlining zoning.
- **Improve soil health practices on all landscapes and off farms** through technical assistance and training, education and outreach, and leveraging federal funding
- **Build a sustainable and equitable food system** through support for urban agriculture and strengthening state grant programs.
- **Prepare farms for climate change** by improving use of federal and state programs and better engaging and supporting socially disadvantaged producers, including Black, Indigenous, and people of color (BIPOC).
- **Sustain environmental and soil health** by working with partners to improve research to develop additional weather stations, prediction models and practices for water management, including excesses, droughts, storage, and use.
- **Address coastal acidification with a focus on impacts to the shell-fishing industry** by developing research and monitoring and joining the International Association to Combat Ocean Acidification.
- **Develop a governance structure to facilitate oversight, implementation of strategies and actions pertaining to climate adaptation and resiliency.** Governance structure

may include interagency, Councils of Governments, municipal, and other stakeholder participation.

- **Advance priority planning tasks related to resilient infrastructure in Connecticut**, including evacuation route planning, vulnerability assessments, identifying communities isolated during floods, identifying best available science for updating standards and guidelines, and proposals for maintaining resilience structures.

### **HB 6441: An Act Concerning Climate Change Adaptation**

In this bill, Governor Lamont is proposing four proposals as recommended by the GC3. These proposals would expand the tools municipalities have to fund and finance climate adaptation and resilience projects through 1) authorizing the creation of stormwater utilities statewide, 2) enabling the option for municipalities to adopt a buyers' conveyance fee for resilience and environmental projects, 3) adding flood prevention and climate resilience to the purview of municipal flood and erosion control boards, and 4) expanding the Green Bank to include an Environmental Infrastructure Bank.

Section 3 of the bill authorizes municipalities to adopt a buyer's real estate conveyance fee. This dedicated fee could be used by municipalities to fund municipal land conservation, stewardship, climate mitigation, resilience, and adaptation strategies, and other community environmental projects.

Section 19 (4) defines "environmental infrastructure" to include structures, facilities, systems, services, and improvement projects related to agriculture. This change would increase funding access to farmers, and we are supportive of this change.

This bill supports #31 of the Working and Natural Lands GC3 recommendations on funding resources to implement *all* natural and working lands recommendations for mitigation resilience projects.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today on HB 6441 and I would be happy to answer any questions.