



# STATE OF CONNECTICUT DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

Office of the Commissioner



Bryan P. Hurlburt  
Commissioner

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## ENVIRONMENT COMMITTEE PUBLIC HEARING March 3, 2021

### COMMISSIONER BRYAN P. HURLBURT TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF HB 6496: An Act Concerning Certain Soil-Health Initiatives

Senator Cohen, Representative Borer, Senator Miner, Representative Harding, and honorable members of the Environment Committee. Thank you for raising this bill on behalf of the Department and for the opportunity to testify on House Bill 6496. For the record, my name is Bryan Hurlburt, the Commissioner of the Department of Agriculture.

Over the past year, the Department of Agriculture participated in and spearheaded the Agriculture/Soils Working group of the Governor's Council on Climate Change. The language in this bill includes soil health in the Erosion and Sediment Control Guidelines and in the overall mission for the Department of Energy and Environmental Protection.

House Bill 6496 adds the responsibility for soil health to the duties of the Council on Soil and Water, and the conservation districts. The Department has a seat on the Council and the Council was instrumental in the development of the Governor's Council on Climate Change (GC3) Report. We would request that when prime and important soils are considered, that the Department of Agriculture is included in these programs and conversations in a substantial way and will continue to work with DEEP and our partners on these efforts.

The Department has concerns with Section 6 of the proposed bill. This section creates a streamlined process for marine dredging rather than the current permit process. Currently the state requires a chemical analysis of the materials with the application in order to determine their toxicity. Eliminating that requirement would enable dredging with no knowledge of what is being dumped in the water or on land. Should this be permitted near shell fishing areas, particularly town recreational areas, the department asks for more limitations to reduce the transport of contaminants to the shellfish area. The Department of Agriculture's Bureau of Aquaculture makes a determination of significant impact to shellfish resources and shellfish habitat, and we request that any streamlined process continues to include the department in order to preserve and protect Connecticut's shellfish industry.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify on this bill and I am happy to answer any questions.