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Working Lands Alliance Policy Statement S.B. 952 Energy and Technology Committee Public Hearing March 4, 2021

Dear Co-Chairs Sen. Needleman and Rep. Arconti, Vice-Chairs Sen. Winfield and Rep. Allie-Brennan, Ranking Members Sen. Formica and Rep. Ferraro, and members of the Energy and Technology Committee:

The Working Lands Alliance appreciates this opportunity to submit testimony in opposition of S.B. 952, Sec. 10 - An Act Concerning Certain Solar Energy Projects

My name is Chelsea Gazillo, and I am the Director of the Working Lands Alliance (WLA), a broad-based, statewide coalition dedicated to preserving Connecticut's farmland. WLA includes farmers and organizations such as CT Farmland Trust, the CT State Grange, New CT Farmer Alliance, City of New Haven Food Policy Division, CT Conservation Council and the CT Farm Bureau Association, among many others. As an Alliance, we care deeply about saving Connecticut's farmland and ensuring a healthy agricultural sector and prosperous future for Connecticut's farmers.

Connecticut has ambitious climate goals and is making considerable progress reducing regional greenhouse gas emissions through a range of activities including increasing the share of renewables in the electric supply, and displacing fossil fuels. However, the rapid expansion of renewable energy installations across the state has started to compromise CT's best farmland and core forests; part of our green infrastructure that are critical to addressing climate change. This new pressure compounds the severe "competition for land" in Connecticut, underpinning the need to develop smarter solar siting and grid infrastructure as a uniquely flexible tool to combat climate change while reinforcing the conservation of our most precious lands and natural resources.

Connecticut's working lands are at the heart of the food system. As such, we must be thoughtful and deliberate in how and where we site solar arrays in the state. The acceleration of large-scale solar arrays on farmland threatens the state's efforts to protect farmland with conservation easements from development.

This is counterproductive to our current efforts to protect farmland; promote farm viability; address high rates of food insecurity because of the COVID-19 pandemic; and promote climate change mitigation, adaptation and resiliency using nature-based solutions, biodiversity, and economic diversification. Rather than an expedited process, we support more rigorous and inclusive review of the



solicitation, approval, and construction of these projects with additional transparency.

Our recent comments on the CT Department of Energy and Environmental Protections draft Integrated Resources Plan that we developed as part of a conservation coalition, raised concerns about the loss of working and natural lands without consideration of the ecosystem benefits lost or degraded. Below is the recommendation we developed as part of this coalition:

Conduct a stakeholder process to improve the transparency, predictability, and efficiency of solar siting and permitting in Connecticut is similar to the language we proposed and the language in the GC3 report. We support convening a stakeholder group that includes representatives of the environmental community that understand the extent and value of the multitude of ecosystems services provided by working and natural lands in Connecticut. We strongly recommend that the full reports generated by the GC3 Working and Natural Lands subgroups be utilized to inform this process. Prior efforts have relied on amending the Siting Council process but any recommended policy/guidance needs to address the process prior to the submission of any permit application.

Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony opposing S.B. 952, Sec. 10. Please contact me if you have any questions.

With sincere regards,

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Working Lands Alliance

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