

**Government Administration and Elections Committee**  
**JOINT FAVORABLE REPORT**

**Bill No.:** HB-6679

AN ACT CONCERNING THE LEASE OF A PARCEL OF STATE LAND IN THE

**Title:** CITY OF MILFORD.

**Vote Date:** 5/19/2021

**Vote Action:** Joint Favorable Substitute

**PH Date:** 5/14/2021

**File No.:** 760

***Disclaimer:** The following JOINT FAVORABLE Report is prepared for the benefit of the members of the General Assembly, solely for purposes of information, summarization and explanation and does not represent the intent of the General Assembly or either chamber thereof for any purpose.*

**Sponsors of the Bill:**

The Government Administration and Elections Committee

**Reasons for Bill:**

To lease a parcel of state land in the city of Milford to the Connecticut Audubon Society.

**Response from Administration/Agency:**

**Katie S. Dykes, Commissioner, Connecticut Department of Energy and Environmental Protection:**

The Department and the Connecticut Audubon Society have enjoyed a long and productive partnership in providing public access to area known locally as Milford Point. They recommend that the first sentence of paragraph (b) be changed to “The CT Audubon Society shall use said parcel of land for open space purposes and public access as determined by the Commissioner of Energy and Environmental Protection and as provided for in the lease agreement.” Given the many resources and purposes for public and agency access to and through the parcel, the amended language will ensure that public interests in accessing both state and federal wildlife lands will endure.

**Nature and Sources of Support:**

**Representative Frank Smith:**

The Coastal Center has been a good neighbor and valued member of the Milford Point community and an exemplary tenant to the State of Connecticut as caretaker and steward of the 8-acre nature preserve it oversees. Moreover, it is a premier environmental and educational facility in the area attracting students and birding enthusiasts from all over the region. We are proud to have it in our town.

**Patrick M. Comins, Executive Director, Connecticut Audubon Society:**

For 25 years the Connecticut Audubon Society has been the steward and caretaker of the Milford Point Coastal Center and the 8-acre nature preserve that surrounds it. They have managed and improved the rare coastal habitat and have provided access to a unique part of the Long Island Sound coast for a quarter of a million visitors or more over the years. They've been doing so under a lease with the DEEP, which owns the property. Unfortunately, the lease expired a decade ago, although have continued to manage and to upgrade the Coastal Center in the ensuing years. The lease needs to be renewed, and this legislation will allow us to sign another lease with the department.

**George Amato, Board of Advisors Chair, Milford Point Coastal Center:**

For over 25 years, this site has been managed effectively and responsibly by the CT Audubon Society's Milford Point Coastal Center in close cooperation and partnership with DEEP. During that time, the Coastal Center at Milford Point has become a major area of nature based recreation, conservation, education and family programs for the state. The renewal of the lease by CT DEEP will allow for continued, responsible management of this unique area on Long Island Sound for the benefit of all our citizens, and for the environmental health of our State.

**Audubon Connecticut:**

Passage of this legislation will solidify the CT Audubon Society's continued management and stewardship of this property. The lease will give the people of CT and the CT Audubon Society peace of mind that this Important Bird Area (IBA) is available for everyone to visit, both now and into the future.

**Amy Blaymore Paterson, Executive Director, Connecticut Land Conservation Council:**

Through the dedication of CAS, its members, and partners, Milford Point has become one of the most important nature centers in New England. It provides a critical coastal habitat for birds and other wildlife, and essential access and environmental education opportunities for the general public. HB 6679 would allow DEEP to renew its lease with CAS and ensure that Milford Point continues to operate for the benefit of people and wildlife now, and for generations to come.

**Eric Hammerling, Executive Director, Connecticut Forest & Park Association:** Without CT Audubon on site, DEEP might be struggling with the costs and responsibilities associated with maintaining the facility and grounds. It is a testament to Connecticut Audubon's commitment to the Milford Point site that their organization has continued to make annual investments in facility maintenance and property stewardship for several years without having a renewed lease agreement in place.

**DeWitt Allen, President; Deborah Johnson, Conservation Chair, New Haven Bird Club:**

They have long supported these efforts with deep appreciation for the work done at the site to protect the endangered and threatened birds that nest there, and the habitat improvements undertaken. The Society provides shoreline access and parking for our First Wednesday and other bird walks during the year, and the site is an important birding destination for many of NHBC's members.

**Craig Repasz, President, Friends of the Stewart B. McKinney National Wildlife Refuge:**

CAS supports conservation efforts by allowing volunteers for the refuge to stage up at their facility before going out for beach clean ups, wildlife monitoring, and nesting bird protection. The CAS Coastal Center at Milford Point is a vital to the conservation efforts.

**Nature and Sources of Opposition:**

None expressed.

**Reported by: Dallas Emerle**

**Date: 5-19-21**