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New CT Farmer Alliance

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Richard Roberts
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Jim Smith
Cushman Farm

Latha Swamy
City of New Haven Food System
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STAFF

Chelsea Gazillo
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Working Lands Alliance Policy Statement Environment Committee *In support of H.B. 5608* Public Hearing February 15, 2023

Dear Co-Chairs Sen. Lopes and Rep. Gresko, Vice-Chairs Sen. Hochadel and Rep. Palm, Ranking Members Sen. Harding and Rep. Callahan, and esteemed members of the Environment Committee:

Working Lands Alliance appreciates the opportunity to submit testimony *in support of H.B. 5608* – An Act Concerning Certain Solar Photovoltaic Facilities Located on Prime Farmland, Farmland of State-Wide Importance or Core Forest Lands.

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

If passed, this legislation would require developers of solar projects approved by the Siting Council on prime farmland to post a decommissioning bond sufficient to restore the farmland to a productive agricultural condition upon decommissioning of the solar array. WLA recognizes that some solar developers are already doing this as a best practice and may agree, as a matter of course, to pay for the decommissioning of a solar array based on its size, location, and complexity.

According to a 2020, New England Farmland Solar Policy Brief put together by American Farmland Trust, H.B. 5608 would put Connecticut in alignment with the four other New England states that already require decommissioning for farmland solar. Additionally, this bill would ensure that landowners are not left with acres of defunct solar equipment and degraded soil on their land years after their productive use, with no recourse to recoup the costs they face of removal and restoration. This bill appropriately puts the onus of decommissioning on the developer, not the farmer or landowner.

WLA respects Governor Lamont's Executive Order One signed in 2019 that directs State government to reduce Greenhouse Gas emission by 45% by 2030. We also respect that Governor Lamont directed that the state shall deploy an average of 10,000 kWDC of new solar capacity annually for the next 10 years, primarily sited new projects sited on state buildings or property in 2021's Executive Order No 21-



3. Transitioning to a sustainable zero carbon economy is not mutually exclusive of continuing to build a local, vibrant and sustainable working lands and food production base.

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WLA recognizes that solar developers may typically agree, as a matter of course, to pay for the decommissioning of a solar array based on the size, location, and complexity. However, some solar companies may not agree to these conditions resulting in farmers becoming fiscally responsible for the decommissioning of a solar array and restoring degraded soils. H.B. 5608 will ensure these farmers are provided adequate funding to decommission the solar arrays and restore the productivity of our working lands.

On behalf of the Working Lands Alliance, I thank the Committee for allowing us to share our support for H.B. 5608. We appreciate all that you have done, both in helping to ensure Connecticut agriculture remains viable and in protecting Connecticut's valuable farmland. Please know that we are available to act as a resource should you seek additional information as you continue with the responsibility of protecting Connecticut's vast environmental resources.

With sincere regards,

Chelsea Gazillo
Working Lands Alliance