

Government Administration and Elections Committee
JOINT FAVORABLE REPORT

Bill No.: SB-435

AN ACT CONCERNING GOVERNMENT ADMINISTRATION, INCLUDING DESIGNATION OF FARM LAND, PROVISION OF REPRODUCTIVE AND GENDER-AFFIRMING HEALTH CARE SERVICES TO PATIENTS LOCATED OUT OF STATE AND REVISIONS TO THE CONNECTICUT ENTITY

Title: TRANSACTIONS ACT.

Vote Date: 3/22/2024

Vote Action: Joint Favorable Substitute

PH Date: 3/18/2024

File No.:

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SPONSORS OF BILL:

Government Administration & Elections Committee

REASONS FOR BILL:

This bill would provide that the evaluation of the Commissioner of Agriculture regarding the designation of farmland shall be the prima facie evidence of such designation, and that revisions are made to the Connecticut Entity Transactions Act.

The substitute language removes the second clause of the bill related to reproductive and gender-affirming healthcare patients located out of the state.

RESPONSE FROM ADMINISTRATION/AGENCY:

None expressed.

NATURE AND SOURCES OF SUPPORT:

Doug Bussa, Owner, Bussa Orchards: Supports this bill because of his first-hand experience dealing with a tax assessor who did not believe his property was taxed correctly, leaving him to pay an additional \$3,500. States that he was told to go to court to fight this assessment, and that this bill would save both him and the town money.

Ross Girardin: Supports this bill because a tax assessor with little to no knowledge about farming should not be allowed to deny a farm its Public Act 490 status.

Kathy Hazen Downey: Supports this bill because it will help ensure that all working farms, regardless of size or the crop grown, will benefit. She writes about her own experience with dealing with tax assessors who do not understand that the state law sets no minimum for farmland to qualify for PA 490.

Brian Kogut: Supports this bill because the new tax assessor in his town removed certain parcels of farmland from the PA 490 program, including land that he and his family farm on. States that this bill would help protect farmers from expensive legal fees that are often required to protect their farmland, which most cannot afford.

Lori Longhi: Supports this bill because the tax assessor in her town has continued to remove parcels of farmland from falling under PA 490 status and telling them that what they are doing isn't farming. States that farmers have to go to the Department of Agriculture for an opinion letter to the town assessor, which is time-consuming and a very thorough process. Also states that farmers should not have to face the costly alternative of going to court as many cannot afford the legal fees.

Susan Phillips, Board Secretary, Fiddleheads Food Co-op: Supports this bill because it would end the CETA prohibition of food corporations merging into cooperatives. States that co-ops have advocated for change and modernization in the statutes to reduce the number of liability issues that they have faced under the current statutes where the Secretary of The State can deny a merger citing the CETA.

Nikki Price: Supports this bill and believes that the Commissioner of Agriculture should have the final say in determining whether certain land should be considered farmland under PA 490. States that it is important that this decision lay in their hands because they are the most knowledgeable regarding what is considered farming and what land is farmland, and that this bill helps farmers protect their land under PA 490.

Sharen Santoski, Consultant: Supports this bill because she has been dismayed by the increasing assessments for farmland, and that it is important that the Department of Agriculture has the final say in determining what is farming as they are the most knowledgeable about farmland.

Duncan Wilber, Farmer, Wilber Farms: Supports this bill because of his own experience dealing with a tax assessor who had continuously questioned his farmland and acreage throughout the process of him applying for PA 490 status. States that he received countless replies from various credible sources that he is rightfully opposed to the way he has been treated by the tax assessor, and that he has faced significant legal fees to fight the town in court, and that these fees could have been avoided if the Department of Agriculture could have the final say on whether land should be considered farmland.

Susan Zimmerman, Board Director, Fiddleheads Natural Food Co-op: Supports this bill because it will allow businesses already operating as cooperatives to now be classified as cooperatives under Chapter 395. States that this bill would allow cooperatives to benefit from the modernized statutes and encourage new businesses in Connecticut.

Anonymous, Anonymous, Owner of A CT Small Farm: Supports this bill because of their own frightening experience of having their farm on the line with little to no control over the outcome. States that this bill will give members of the farming community a voice in making decisions that affect the future of farmers and farmland in this state.

Andrew Blum, Owner, Arthur's Farms LLC: Supports this bill because farmers are subject to the whim of the tax assessor who is motivated to collect tax revenue, and thus has a conflict of interest that should disqualify them from determining what a farm is. States that a qualified third party should have control over this issue.

Robert Buck, President, Connecticut State Grange: Supports this bill because it will give advisory power to the Department of Agriculture regarding a farm's PA 490 status. States that farmers often have to pay costly legal fees to fight against their exemptions being removed, and that adding this third-party judgement to streamline the process for determining eligibility for exemption is vital for the viability of Connecticut farms.

Chelsea Gazillo, New England Policy Manager, American Farmland Trust: Supports this bill because it strengthens the farmers' ability to maintain farmland and avoid high property taxes under PA 490. States that this bill would make the appeals process for farmers who receive inaccurate tax assessments less cumbersome and would save farmers money on taxes for land that is exempt under PA 490.

Brian Kelliher, Farmer: Supports this bill because the tax assessor in his town decided to remove parts of his property from being exempt from PA 490 status, which would have resulted in a significant tax increase. States that this bill would remove interpretation from generally uninformed tax assessors.

Art Mullen: Supports this bill because some of his farmland was removed from PA-490 exemption despite the land being unchanged since 1905. States that tax assessors are unfairly pressuring farmers to pay higher taxes on their land and force them to take up costly legal actions if they want to fight them in court.

Joan Nichols, Executive Director, Connecticut Farm Bureau: Supports this bill because PA-490 for farmland has been recently challenged by town assessors who have exempted certain farmland from receiving its status. States that there is an option for the Department of Agriculture to write an opinion letter, but that the assessor does not have to follow their advice. States that this bill would help farmers avoid the high legal fees associate with challenging the town in court and recommends that a section of the bill have brackets deleted around the words "follow generally accepted agricultural practices".

Bradford Wainman, Member, WFI Property Holdings LLC: Supports this bill because of his own experience being denied PA 490 status by his town's assessor. States that the Department of Agriculture provided a report confirming that his property was an operating farm. States that it would be helpful if the Commissioner of Agriculture had the final say on determining what is considered farmland.

Miriam Theroux: Supports this bill as it will reduce the stress that farmers face while trying to protect their land.

Karen LaPlante: Supports clarifications in this bill regarding classification of farmland.

Vinnie Senatore: Supports this bill as it is important to protect farmland.

NATURE AND SOURCES OF OPPOSITION:

David Gardner, Assessor, Town of Farmington: Opposes this bill because the determination of farmland should be a local issue and not one where the Commissioner of Agriculture has the final say. States that each parcel of land must be reviewed for use for farming purposes to determine whether or not the individual parcels are exempt under PA 490.

Randy Collins, Associate Director of Policy, The CCM: Opposes this bill because it gives the power of determining farmland to the Commissioner of Agriculture and removes it from local assessors. States that the Department has an inherent bias in supporting farmers rather than assessors and shows why the decision of determining what is farmland should rest with local assessors. Also states that the bill places towns at a disadvantage compared to an appointed state official.

Susan Bradford, CT Citizen: Opposes this bill because it would create a "gender affirming madness" that will inevitably lead to lawsuits from individuals and their families who have been damaged by this surgical industry.

Dr. Michelle Cretella, MD: Opposes this bill as puberty blockers can chemically castrate at the level of the brain by negatively affecting sexual function. States that the use of cross-sex hormones can result in dangerous side effects such as blood clots, heart attacks, and strokes for both males and females. Also states that there is no evidence that these procedures are fully reversible, and the long-term complications are unknown.

Anne Manusky, President, CT Republican Assembly: Opposes this bill because "castrated individuals" and healthcare are unrelated. States that there is no evidence of scientific reasoning for gender transitions, thus proving the process of transitioning to be a form of pseudoscience.

Thomas Muska: Opposes this bill because gender dysphoria has become a complex issue, and to prevent parents from having the final say in whether their child receives this life changing operation only exacerbates the problem for the child and their family.

Susan Regan, Host of CT Valley Views: Opposes this bill because it will turn Connecticut into a sanctuary state for doctors who are banned from performing gender changing surgery/pill blocking in other states and would allow them to do such things in Connecticut, which can be dangerous as we do not know their criminal background and cannot know the amount of information they may be receiving about a child's medical records without their parent's consent.

Louis Caruso: Opposes this bill as there is no such thing as gender affirming surgery and it is impossible for someone to change their sex.

Dr. Linda Dalessio: Opposes this bill because there is no such thing as gender affirming care for children, and this bill would make Connecticut less safe by providing a sanctuary for

incompetent surgical doctors. States that this bill would not prevent suicides as research shows that most children who transition eventually go on to commit suicide.

C. Marcella Kurowski: Opposes this bill because there needs to be liability for doctors in order to protect patients.

Mitch Lucas: Opposes this bill because gender affirming care should be illegal for minors as they do not have the mental capacity to understand the effects of the procedure they are undergoing.

Mr. Nick Postovoit: Opposes this bill because it opens the door for children from other states to have procedures done in Connecticut without parental consent. States that this bill seeks to establish gender affirming care for minors while ignoring parental rights and religious freedom.

Christine Rebstock, Executive Director of Media, LBGTBS United: Opposes this bill as it is dangerous to apply gender affirming care to minors who cannot consent as the long-term effects are unknown. States that these procedures are life-altering, unsafe, and likely irreversible.

Anonymous, Anonymous: Opposes this bill because each section of the bill should be separated as they are unrelated. States that they support the farmland portion of the bill.

Anonymous, Anonymous: Opposes this bill as it deceptively tries to connect farmers affairs with doctors trying to mutilate children without repercussions.

Several individuals expressed opposition to this bill.
These individuals include:

Leon Clark
Al Cowan
Lisa Waldo
Mrs. Tracy Wang
Gary Corigliano
Sandra DeBlois
Nicholas D'Amato
Several anonymous individuals

Reported by: Gabriel Marques, Assistant Clerk Date: 4/2/2024