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Testimony of Eric Hammerling, Executive Director, Connecticut Forest & Park Association

Public Hearing Subject Matter	Position
Raised H.B. 6551: AAC ENVIRONMENTAL AIR QUALITY.	Support

The Connecticut Forest & Park Association (CFPA) is the first nonprofit conservation organization established in Connecticut in 1895. For over 125 years, CFPA has offered testimony before the General Assembly on various State Park and Forest, trail recreation, sustainable forestry, and land conservation issues.

I am testifying today to express CFPA's support for Raised HB 6551, An Act Concerning Environmental Air Quality. In 2020, I was honored to serve as Chair of the Forests Sub-Group to the Governor's Council on Climate Change. In our Forests Report to the GC3, we noted the health and socioeconomic inequities in Connecticut's urbanized areas often coincide with lower than average tree canopy coverage. Excerpts from the Report follow:

This lack of canopy is significant because urban trees and other natural systems provide significant health benefits. Trees can improve air and water quality, mitigate the heat island effect, and help alleviate noise.¹ Trees can shield people from ultraviolet (UV) radiation, the cause or contributing factor for three types of skin cancer.² Urban ecosystems are increasingly recommended by national and State environmental protection agencies to mitigate the harmful impacts of air and water pollutants, harmful emissions, and the negative effects of urban heat and noise.³ Trees also help reduce flooding by slowing rainwater runoff.

Access to green spaces also provides other health benefits. Researchers at the University of Exeter surveyed 10,000 urban residents in the United Kingdom, asking how satisfied they were with their lives and whether they had signs of depression, anxiety, or other psychological disorders. After controlling for other factors known to significantly influence well-being, researchers found a strong correlation between a boost in a feeling of well-being overall and increases in green space within a 2.5-mile radius of residents' homes.⁴

Tree planting and stewardship of new and existing trees in urban areas provides many potential benefits to human health, but it's important to note that the top green priority for a neighborhood may not be tree-planting, and policy-makers should be careful to not approach community green spaces with a "top-down" approach.⁵ It is critical to engage the community locally to understand local needs and discuss trees as one potential solution rather than approaching the community with the assumption that tree-planting is the answer. Ongoing stewardship of local investments in green spaces is critical and may be more important than tree-planting depending upon various factors. Ultimately, community support is the foundation for long-term stewardship.

HB 6551 establishes an "Environmental Equity Working Group" that is important to ensure the communities most impacted by climate change are at the table when trees, green spaces, and other important health options for vulnerable communities are considered. Thank you for the opportunity to testify on this bill.

¹ Nowak, David & Dwyer, John. (2010). [Understanding the Benefits and Costs of Urban Forest Ecosystems](#). 10.1007/978-1-4020-4289-8_2.

² [Nowak, D. and Heisler, G. Air Quality Effects of Urban Trees and Parks. National Recreation and Parks Association Research Series. 2010.](#)

³ Wolf, K. L., & Robbins, A. S. (2015). Metro nature, environmental health, and economic value. *Environmental health perspectives*, 123(5), 390–398. <https://doi.org/10.1289/ehp.1408216>

⁴ [White, MP; Alcock, I; Wheeler, BW; et al. Coastal proximity, health and well-being: results from a longitudinal panel survey. Health Place Journal. 2015.](#)

⁵ Mock, B. CityLab Article. “Why Detroit residents pushed back against tree planting.” <https://getpocket.com/explore/item/why-detroit-residents-pushed-back-against-tree-planting>