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John Guskowski
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Environment Committee Public Hearing March 7, 2022

RE: H.B. 5295 -- An Act Concerning Agriculture Development and Innovation

Dear Co-Chairs Sen. Cohen and Rep. Gresko, Vice-Chairs Sen. Slap and Rep. Palm, Ranking Members Sen. Miner and Rep. Harding, and members of the Environment Committee:

Working Lands Alliance appreciates the opportunity to submit testimony **regarding** H.B. 5295 - An Act Concerning Agriculture Development and Innovation. We **conditionally support Sec.2, oppose Sec. 3, and support Sec. 6.**

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

Conditional Support for Sec. 2

WLA is pleased to see legislation update the Governor's Council for Agricultural Development (GCAD), which has not met since 2018. The GCAD is a critical advisory board to the CT Department of Agriculture concerning the development, diversification, and promotion of agricultural products, programs, and enterprise in the state and shall provide an interchange of ideas from the various commodity groups and organizations represented.

Subsection (a): Governor's Council for Agricultural Development and Innovation. This retains the focus of Agricultural Development while recognizing the need to address Agricultural Innovation. As the CT Farm Bureau Association mentioned in their testimony, the GCAD should be maintained as an independent advisory council for which the Council was initially intended and not reconfigured for administrative purposes under a state agency. Therefore, we oppose this change. The dedicated Council positions representing a cross-section of the agricultural community and stakeholders should remain unchanged and not amended. We do not support the removal of dedicated positions. We would recommend explicitly adding additional agriculture stakeholder groups, including but not limited to New CT Farmer Alliance, CT NOFA, CT Farmland Trust, CT Greenhouse Growers Association, etc.



Subsections (b) and (c): We support the proposed amendments to this section to allow for the broader expansion of the work of the Council.

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Opposition to Sec. 3

WLA cares deeply about increasing farmland access opportunities for the next generation of CT producers. As the CT Farm Bureau Association stated in their testimony, the potential subdivision of future land easements held by the CT Department of Agriculture is a significant and fundamental change to the program and a complex issue. WLA welcomes the opportunity to continue the discussion with the CT Department of Agriculture regarding the future subdivision of Purchase of Development Right (PDR) easements. We would support the development of a task force to study and research best practices regarding the future subdivision of agricultural easements. We would also recommend this discussion include the CT Department of Agriculture, the Farmland Preservation Advisory Board, funding partners, and stakeholders.

WLA supports other tools for providing land access for new and beginning farmers and existing farmers, such as the Option to Purchase at Agricultural Value (OPAV) and Buy-Protect-Sell.

Support of Sec. 6

WLA supports creating a CT Grown license plate to be administered by the Commissioner of Motor Vehicles. If passed, the funds from the sale of these license plates shall be deposited in the CT Grown account, increasing marketing opportunities for CT Grown producers. States like Massachusetts and California have similar license plate programs.

Working Lands Alliance sincerely appreciates the opportunity to submit this testimony **with conditional support** of H.B. 5295 -- An Act Concerning Agriculture Development and Innovation.

Please feel free to reach out to me at cgazillo@farmland.org, if you have any further questions.

With sincere regards,

Chelsea Gazillo
Working Lands Alliance Director

STAFF

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