

Environment Committee JOINT FAVORABLE REPORT

Bill No.: HB-5608

AN ACT CONCERNING CERTAIN SOLAR PHOTOVOLTAIC FACILITIES
LOCATED ON PRIME FARMLAND, FARMLAND OF STATE-WIDE

Title: IMPORTANCE OR CORE FOREST LANDS.

Vote Date: March 3, 2023

Vote Action: JF

PH Date: 2/15/2023

File No.:

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SPONSORS OF BILL:

Environment Committee

REASONS FOR BILL:

To restore farmlands after solar projects

RESPONSE FROM ADMINISTRATION/AGENCY:

None Expressed

NATURE AND SOURCES OF SUPPORT:

Paul Aresta, Executive Director, Council on Environmental Quality:

The Council on Environmental Quality works independently of the Department of Energy and Environmental Protection and we support this bill. It is appropriate that resources be available to decommission approved facilities at the end of the operating live and restore to predevelopment conditions.

Alicea Charmaut, Executive Director, Rivers Alliance:

Rivers Alliance supports requiring an applicant to furnish a bond to cover all costs associated with decommissioning of the facility.

Elizabeth Gara, Connecticut Water Works Association:

As a representative of municipal, private, and regional water companies we support the intent of the bill. No such approval is required for activities on watershed lands not owned by the water company.

Chelsea Gazzillo, Policy Manager, Working Lands Alliance:

As the policy manager of American Farmland Trust's New England, she directs the Working Lands Alliance and supports the bill. This bill directs developers of solar projects to post a decommissioning bond to restore the farmland to a productive condition upon decommissioning. Some solar companies may agree but then some probably won't leaving the farmer responsible for restoring degraded soils.

Joan Nichols, Executive Director, Connecticut Farm Bureau Association:

Ms. Nicholos included in her testimony criteria that is to be met before any bond is released upon decommissioning.

Amy Blaymore Patterson, Executive Director, Connecticut Land Conservation Council:

Ms. Blaymore-Patterson testified on behalf of the Connecticut Land Conservation Council that recognizing the forestland and healthy soil works both ways in climate change impact. The avoidance of loss of working lands and natural lands is the primary goal for large scale solar products and requiring the developer to post a bond ensures restoration of the lands.

Denise Savageau, President, Connecticut Association of Conservation Districts.

It is important to ensure that the burden of decommissioning a solar installion does not fall on the state or local government. The change does not address all the deficiencies in statue and already large-scale solar projects have adversely impacted the health of our water sources. Included are updates to Section 16-50g.

Douglas Schwartz and **Chris Schweitzer** also submitted testimony in support.

NATURE AND SOURCES OF OPPOSITION:

Cary Lynch, Climate Policy Manager, The Nature Conservancy:

The bill is a duplicate of a already required decommissioning plan, it unfairly impedes solar development, and it slows the rapid and necessary buildout of gird-scale solar.

Francis Pullaro, Executive Director, RENEW Northeast:

Francis Pullaro testified against the bill because of the duplicate requirement and included testimony for an amendment.

Reported by: Pamela Bianca

Date: March 3, 2023