



## Testimony on Joint Resolution 35

### Resolution Approving an Amendment to the State Constitution to Protect Real Property Held or Controlled by the State

Government Administration and Elections Committee

Submitted by:

Working Lands Alliance Steering Committee

March 19, 2018

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Senators McLachlan, Flexer, and Scott, Representatives Frantz and Fox, and other distinguished GAE Committee members:

The Working Lands Alliance appreciates this opportunity to submit testimony in support of SJR 35 Resolution Approving an Amendment to the State Constitution to Protect Real Property Held or Controlled by the State.

My name is Chelsea Gazillo and I am the Project Director for the Working Lands Alliance (WLA), a broad-based, statewide coalition dedicated to preserving Connecticut's farmland. WLA includes organizations such as the CT Farm Bureau, the CT State Grange, CT Land Conservation Council, End Hunger CT!, and American Farmland Trust, among many others. As an Alliance, we care deeply about both Connecticut's farmland and about the viability and success of the farm businesses that work that land.

Our coalition strongly supports SJ 35, an identical proposal to last year's SJ 39 which passed both chambers. SJ 35 would require a public hearing and a 2/3rds affirmative vote of the General Assembly before any land or interest in land held by the Department of Energy & Environmental Protection (state parks, forests, etc.) or the Department of Agriculture (state-owned agricultural lands or easements acquired through the Farmland Preservation Program) could be sold, traded or donated.

While most legislative conveyances of lands of conservation and agricultural value are done through a transparent and thoughtful process, there have been instances where such land has been conveyed without the benefit of public input. This resolution (and any subsequent vote on a constitutional amendment) requires a public hearing opportunity on all conveyances done legislatively. It also seeks to set a higher threshold for conveyance, by requiring passage by two-thirds rather than a simple majority.

In January of 2014, the Connecticut Council on Environmental Quality issued a report with examples of both proposed and approved conveyances which occurred without the benefit of a formal public comment opportunity. CEQ's report, *Preserved but Maybe Not: The Impermanence of State Conservation Lands*, which can be found at: [http://www.ct.gov/ceq/lib/ceq/Preserved\\_But\\_Maybe\\_Not.pdf](http://www.ct.gov/ceq/lib/ceq/Preserved_But_Maybe_Not.pdf), also offered recommendations to address this issue.

In conclusion, Working Lands Alliance believes that Connecticut should follow the lead of other states in the region (Massachusetts, New York, and Maine) that already have similar constitutional amendments in place. We believe that CT residents benefit by requiring an

opportunity for public input for any such conveyances. We urge this Committee to act favorably on SJ 35. Thank you for the opportunity to present testimony on this resolution.