



**WORKING  
LANDS  
ALLIANCE**

A Project of American Farmland Trust

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**Testimony in support of HB 5686 (with modifications)**

Environment Committee

Submitted by: Lisa Bassani, Project Director, Working Lands Alliance  
February 27, 2015

Senator Kennedy, Representative Albis, and Committee members:

The Working Lands Alliance appreciates this opportunity to submit testimony in **support of HB 5686, An Act Concerning the Approval of Land Swaps** (with modifications).

The Working Lands Alliance is a broad-based, statewide coalition dedicated to preserving Connecticut's farmland, and includes such organizations as American Farmland Trust, CT Forest & Park Association, CT Farmland Trust, End Hunger CT!, CT Farm Bureau, CT Land Conservation Council, among many others. Our efforts focus on increasing the pace of farmland preservation and, in recent years, we have also worked with key partners to strengthen protections of our state-held agricultural and conservation lands. While we have made advances in securing protection of these state lands that have high agricultural and conservation value, they also remain vulnerable to sale or exchange.

Our coalition supports the overall goals of HB 5686, which would provide a clearer and more open process when lands held by the Department of Agriculture or the Department of Energy and Environmental Protection (DEEP) are proposed for exchange. The bill also provides protections for lands that are swapped, requiring that a) any easement or encumbrance on the land remains in effect after the exchange and b) that there is a reverter clause stipulating that the land or interest in land revert back to the state if the easement is violated or not upheld. We support these aspects of the bill and the effort to make such exchanges more transparent.

However, our coalition believes this bill could be strengthened in the following areas. The bill should expand beyond exchanges only and include any conveyance of lands held by the Department of Agriculture and DEEP. We also believe that a public hearing is valuable in providing needed transparency in the process, but believe the public's interest would be better served if said hearing was held by the Environment Committee in the legislature, rather than by the respective Commissioner. We also support adding a layer of oversight by expanding the scope of review of the State Properties Review Board, as proposed in the testimony submitted by the Connecticut Land Conservation Council.

On behalf of the Working Lands Alliance, I urge you to act favorably on HB 5686, with the modifications noted.