



**WORKING
LANDS
ALLIANCE**

A Project of American Farmland Trust

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Testimony in Support of Sections 63 and 13(d)(3) of SB 947

Finance, Revenue, and Bonding Committee

Submitted by: Lisa Bassani, Project Director, Working Lands Alliance

April 13, 2015

Senator Fonfara, Representative Berger, and Committee members:

The Working Lands Alliance appreciates this opportunity to submit testimony in **support of Sections 63 and 13(d)(3) of SB 947**, An Act Authorizing and Adjusting Bonds of the State for Capital Improvements, Transportation and Other Purposes.

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 in the state and advancing the economic viability of Connecticut agriculture.

Our coalition supports Section 63, which provides \$10 million in FY 16 and 17 authorizations for the Department of Agriculture's Farmland Preservation Program. This kind of consistent and robust funding allows the Department of Agriculture to continue to make progress towards the overall state goal of preserving 130,000 acres of farmland. The interest in the program from farmers is strong. Currently the Department has 73 active applications from farmers to preserve their land, with an estimated total value of \$37 million dollars for these easements. This demand will remain strong as a result of the level of investments this Governor has made (and continues to make) in the Program.

Our coalition also supports the \$10 million in annual authorizations for the Open Space and Watershed Land Acquisition Grant program (OSWA) in Section 13(d)(3). This grant program is the primary tool for land trusts, municipalities and water companies to protect valuable conservation lands (including agricultural lands) in the state.

These bond funds are especially important given the proposed sweep of \$10 million from the OSWA program from the Community Investment Act in the deficiency bill for the current fiscal year. Both the Farmland Preservation Program and OSWA will also be directly impacted by the complete sweep of Community Investment Act funds proposed in the Governor's biennial budget.

Bond funding ensures the consistent investment in our primary land protection programs. We urge the Committee to support Sections 63 and 13(d)(3) of SB 947.