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Testimony to Environment Committee Opposing Senate Bill 141 and in Support of Senate Bill 138

Submitted by: Lisa Bassani, Working Lands Alliance
February 24, 2016

Senator Kennedy, Representative Albis, and Committee members:

The Working Lands Alliance appreciates this opportunity to submit testimony on Senate Bill 141, An Act Concerning Revision of Definitional, Timing, and Procedural Provisions of the Inland Wetland and Watercourses Act and Senate Bill 138, An Act Concerning the Term and Fee for Certain Licenses by the Department of Agriculture and the Designation of the Department of Agriculture as the Lead Agency for Purposes of the Food Safety Modernization Act.

The Working Lands Alliance is a broad-based, statewide coalition dedicated to preserving Connecticut's farmland, and includes such organizations as American Farmland Trust, Connecticut Forest & Park Association, CT Farmland Trust, End Hunger CT!, Connecticut Farm Bureau, CT Land Conservation Council, among many others. Our efforts focus on increasing the pace of farmland preservation and advancing agricultural viability in Connecticut.

Our coalition opposes SB 141 and is concerned with the changes proposed to the Inland Wetland and Watercourses Act. We are concerned with the provisions that shift oversight away from the Department of Energy and Environmental Protection to municipalities, taking away DEEP as a needed backstop to give proper direction to those municipalities and their respective inland wetland agency. This uniform state enforcement and oversight of delegated authority helps ensure that these local wetlands commissions are acting responsibly, and avoids costly and unnecessary lawsuits. In addition, we are concerned with the lack of stakeholder input in the proposed revision to this important statute. We strongly suggest that DEEP convene all the relevant partners and stakeholders to properly assess any potential changes and their impacts before amending this statute.

Our coalition also wishes to express our support for SB 138, particularly Section 5, which names the Department of Agriculture as the lead agency for implementing, administering, and enforcing the federal Food Safety Modernization Act. We believe the Department of Agriculture is best equipped to bring farmers into compliance with FSMA, given the existing set of relationships

with the farm community and the steps the Department has already taken to ensure that farmers will meet the stated requirements. In 2015, the Department was the first in the nation to offer grants (Farm State Assistance for Enhancements Grant) to help support our farmers in improving and diversifying their production in accordance with anticipated FSMA regulations. With this necessary work already in process through the Department of Agriculture, we urge this committee to support SB 138 and designate the Department of Agriculture as the lead agency for FSMA.

Thank you for the opportunity to present testimony on these two bills.