



Connecticut State Grange

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TESTIMONY OF THE CONNECTICUT STATE GRANGE IN SUPPORT OF COMMITTEE BILL NO. 5363, AN ACT TRANSFERRING THE CONSERVATION FUNCTIONS OF THE DEPARTMENT OF ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION TO THE DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

MARCH 14, 2011

I am Gordon Gibson of Vernon, Vice Chair of the Board of Directors and Legislative Liaison for the Connecticut State Grange. I am speaking today in support of Committee Bill 5363, An Act Transferring the Conservation Functions of the Department of Environmental Protection to the Department of Agriculture. This bill is particularly appropriate this year when there is also Governor's Bill 6386 which would create a Department of Energy and Environmental Protection.

The Department of Environmental Protection has had two major branches since it was created forty years ago. Environmental Quality was the larger branch and dealt with controlling and reducing the pollution in our land, air and water and was primarily a regulatory operation. The smaller branch was Conservation and Preservation which dealt with our state parks, forests and wildlife and was primarily a service operation. The two branches have little in common with each other and are often in direct opposition to each other. Speaking as a retiree from the Conservation and Preservation branch of the Department, I can tell you we were the much smaller branch in terms of personnel and often felt like the stepchild of the Department. There were occasions when the Conservation and Preservation branch had to file an application for a permit from the Environmental Quality branch and, after a public hearing, the permit was denied. This definitely did not help the Department's public image.

Prior to the creation of the Department of Environmental Protection, the conservation and preservation functions were part of the Department of Agriculture and Natural Resources and functioned very well there. Trees and wildlife are crops that are nurtured and harvested just like vegetables and beef. Parks and forests have much more in common with productive farmland than they do with factories, landfills and waste treatment plants. Parks and forests are also more compatible with nearby farmland than they are with residential neighbors. When the Department of Agriculture's Farmland Preservation Division is evaluating farms to preserve, they attempt to create large blocks of land where normal farm operations will not disturb residential neighbors. Farmland adjacent to parks and forest scores significantly higher than land adjacent to residential areas.

Now we have an opportunity to resolve the problems that were created in 1971 when the Department of Environmental protection was created by transferring the conservation functions back to the Department of Agriculture and changing

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its name to the Department of Agriculture and Natural Resources. This is a particularly good year to make this change while we are also proposing to combine the functions and authority of the Environmental Quality branch with those of the Department of Public Utility Control in a new Department of Energy and Environmental Protection as proposed in Governor's Bill 6386. It is also a good year to make this change because we have a Commissioner of Agriculture who has experience in both the Department of Agriculture and the Conservation and Preservation branch of the Department of Environmental Protection which will aid him in creating a properly functioning Department of Agriculture and natural Resources.

On behalf of the nearly 4,000 Grange members throughout Connecticut I thank the Environment Committee for introducing bill 5363 and urge its passage into law by the 2011 General Assembly.

Thank you for your consideration of my testimony.

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Testimony Date: March 14, 2011