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TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF SENATE JOINT RESOLUTION 15, RESOLUTION PROPOSING AN AMENDMENT TO THE STATE CONSTITUTION CONCERNING THE ENVIRONMENT AND NATURAL RESOURCES OF THE STATE

FEBRUARY 19, 2016

I am Gordon Gibson of Vernon, Legislative Liaison for the Connecticut State Grange, speaking today in support of Senate Joint Resolution 5, Resolution Proposing an Amendment to the State Constitution Concerning the Environment and Natural Resources of the State. The Grange has supported the preservation of our natural resources ever since it was founded in 1867 because of their importance to the quality of our lives. I supervised the acquisition of land and easements for the various programs of the former Department of Environmental Protection for 19 years and am very familiar with the time, effort and money needed to accomplish those acquisitions. Many times people sold or donated their land to the State because they felt that was the most secure way to preserve our natural resources for the benefit of present and future generations of Connecticut residents and visitors. Now people are losing their faith in the State's promises to preserve their land which contributes so much to the quality of life in Connecticut because the State has proposed putting our supposedly preserved land to other uses. The Grange therefore supports the proposed amendment to the State Constitution to protect and preserve the environmental and natural resources of the State.

While the Grange thoroughly supports the amendment proposed in Senate Joint Resolution 5 we feel it does not go far enough. The State, acting through the Department of Agriculture, has purchased and continues to purchase the development rights to agricultural land so it will be available to produce crops needed to provide food for present and future generations of Connecticut residents. The authorizing legislation allows for the release of the preservation restrictions when necessary but to date there has been only one release concerning a very small piece of land needed to straighten out a sharp curve in a narrow road which provided access to one of our larger farms. There are, however, several cases where someone has approached the State with a request to release development rights so the land can be used for something other than agriculture. Based on the history of land under the custody and control of the former Department of Environmental Protection, now the Department of Energy and Environmental Protection, being considered for release from its original preservation intent, the Grange would like to see Senate Joint Resolution 5 expanded to specifically include the possible release of development rights to both publicly and privately owned farm land.

Thank you for your consideration of my testimony.

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