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Testimony of Eric Hammerling, Executive Director, Connecticut Forest & Park Association

Public Hearing Subject Matter	Position
Raised S.B. 998: AN ACT ESTABLISHING A TAX ABATEMENT FOR CERTAIN CONSERVATION EASEMENTS.	Strongly Support

The Connecticut Forest & Park Association (CFPA) is the first nonprofit conservation organization established in Connecticut in 1895. For over 128 years, CFPA has offered testimony before the General Assembly on various State Park and Forest, trail recreation, sustainable forestry, and land conservation issues.

I want to thank the Committee for raising SB 998 that would authorize two tools for communities who host state-designated greenway trails and wish to ensure long-term, compatible public access to these amazing resources.

Recreational trails are the heart of Connecticut's outdoor recreation economy, which generated \$3.9 billion in direct revenues and supported over 44,000 private sector jobs in 2021.¹ According to the Connecticut Trail Census at UConn, recreational trails provide many benefits to communities (following are links to helpful summaries of trail benefits prepared by the Trail Census):

- [Trails promote health](#)
- [Trails support economies](#)
- [Trails build communities](#)
- [Trails enhance resiliency](#)

State-designated greenways are recreational resources that often stretch across a patchwork of private, municipal, and state-owned lands. Private landowner hosts are critical to keep trail corridors unbroken, but these lands are also the most vulnerable to disruption without incentives for protection as properties are developed and/or subdivided over time.

The abatement of property taxes that would be enabled, but not required, under the first section of this raised bill. Plus, this permissive authority for a municipality could only be utilized under certain limited conditions:

- A landowner can only apply for this tax abatement if a municipality has first passed a local ordinance.
- It must be a state-designated terrestrial trail corridor designated using statutory criteria ([C.G.S. 23-100](#)).
- A landowner is required to place a permanent conservation restriction on the trail corridor.
- The width of the corridor is limited to 100 feet, which must be surveyed at landowner expense.

We expect that the short-term cost to most communities would be relatively minor, especially in light of the significant benefits to the community of ensuring long-term access to greenways of statewide significance. Indeed, given that property values are typically enhanced in the vicinity of protected trails, the municipality may actually experience an increase in property tax revenues.

¹ [Bureau of Economic Analysis report on Outdoor Recreation](#) published in November, 2022.

The cost of property tax abatement would also be limited because there would be a conservation easement placed on the trail corridor. Placing a conservation easement on a property can reduce the appraised value by two-thirds or more. This bill would enable but not require a municipality to abate the property tax by the remaining one-third of the value of that trail corridor. Remember, the trail corridor is already limited in width and must meet the criteria of being a state-designated greenway.

The second section of this bill provides an additional permissive tool to towns that are utilizing the open space designation of the Public Act 490 program. There would be no change in the function of the underlying P.A. 490 program, but SB 998 clarifies that a trail corridor may be considered open space by a municipality that wishes to embrace this tool.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify in support of this important bill, and I'd be glad to respond to any questions you may have.