



February 26, 2018

Testimony In Support of **S.B. 181, An Act Establishing A Pilot Program for the Preservation of Open Space**

Dear Chairmen Lemar, Cassano and Logan, Ranking Member Zawistowski and Members of the Planning & Development Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to testify on behalf of Audubon Connecticut, the state office of the National Audubon Society. My name is Genese Leach and I am the Policy Manager of Audubon Connecticut.

Audubon Connecticut provides education and conservation programs across the state, and we strongly support S.B. 181. If enacted, this legislation would increase support for the preservation and protection of open space and parkland across our State.

S.B. 181 creates a pilot program for select cities and towns in Connecticut to invest in their community. Essentially, it provides a local option for select towns to impose a fee of up to 1% on the purchase of residential real estate in excess of \$150,000 to create a local fund that supports open space acquisition and stewardship.

As you know, protecting open space is difficult with limited funding from **both** state and federal sources. Open space and parks preserve the character of Connecticut cities and towns but once open space is gone, it is gone forever. Enacting S.B. 181 will help to maintain and enhance sustainable communities and increase local investments. It will help protect open space that has already been acquired. It is essential for local communities who want to harness a dedicated and replenishing revenue stream to protect and steward open space.

Of concern to Audubon Connecticut, is language that appears to sunset the program after two years. We are concerned that this limitation would not allow sufficient time to evaluate its implementation, success, or effectiveness.

Please empower and enable communities across Connecticut to fund local conservation efforts and preserve the natural beauty and character of our diverse landscape. The land is an important resource that defines that character of our communities and will be there for generations to come.

Similar local open space funding programs have been implemented and have been successful in New York, Rhode Island, Pennsylvania, and West Virginia. S.B. 181 can also create successful outcomes in land conservation and stewardship in cities and towns throughout Connecticut.

Thank you in advance for your support for this legislation, and for encouraging its successful passage out of Committee.

Sincerely,
Genese Leach
Policy Manager