

Lou Mansolillo

From: drake patten <hurricanehillfarm@gmail.com>
Sent: Wednesday, February 5, 2025 5:35 PM
To: House Environment and Natural Resources Committee
Cc: Rep. Handy, Arthur; Rep. McNamara, Joseph M.; Rep. Baginski, Jacquelyn M.; Rep. Lima, Charlene; Rep. Potter, Brandon C.; Rep. Paplauskas, Christopher G.
Subject: Please submit this letter in full to all members of the Committee (OPPOSE H5098)

Chairman Bennet and Honorable Members of the House Environment and Natural Resources Committee:

I write to you as a fiber farmer who stewards the only conservation farm in Cranston, a farmer who is deeply engaged in environmental stewardship and land preservation.

I am in deep opposition to H5098 as written.

While providing equal opportunity on items that are tax exempt to those engaged in forestry (while ostensibly quite redundant) is not of particular concern, other proposed changes are tremendously concerning to me and other farmers with whom I have spoken.

First of all, as we attempt to recover from aggressive forest land destruction by commercial solar and the many interventions to protect our forests and timberland, H5098 seems to be completely tone deaf. Factually, Rhode Island is not a timber-rich state-and if we try to become one, surely the last of our forest protections will be for naught. No part of this proposed legislation makes sense based on this fact alone.

There are additional concerning aspects of H5098, including this language around zoning:

*(g) Notwithstanding any other provisions of this chapter, plant agriculture is a permitted use **and forest product operations**, as defined in § 2-27.1-4 are permitted uses within all zoning districts of a municipality, including all industrial and commercial zoning districts, except where prohibited for public health or safety reasons or the protection of wildlife habitat*

Forest operation are VASTLY different than the majority of farming activities as currently represented in the language. This language suggests the State wishes to overstep what is typically municipal control by re-zoning the entire community with H5098. While the right may exist, is this wise? Have Members spoken with our 39 cities and towns regarding this change?

Again, forestry is NOT the same as farming. In our community, landscaping operations and tree services serving as *de facto* forestry operations would be blanket permitted by such a change. This is a terrible one-size-fits-all proposal. These operations create many nuisances: noise, dust, industrial equipment runoff and perhaps most front of mind these days, carry a heavy risk of fire. Recently, one such business here in Cranston experienced a major fire that shut down 295 (luckily, since any other wind direction would have burned down multiple houses and, being in the middle of the night, may also have taken lives). The property was storing large piles of chipped logs, and whole logs; all of it a tinderbox.

Also of concern is the new taxation proposals on structures. Farm/forest/open space already has very favorable tax rates on land. Should this change be passed, then certainly farms will expect their own parity. We farmers are not given a special tax rate on our buildings-indeed, in retaliation for getting a better land rate, many of us see our structures taxed at rates that exceed our neighbors -presumably to make up for lost land revenue (by way of example, my two barns -one built in 2017 and one in 1830 are BOTH taxed at an equal per sq ft rate that is the highest in the city-literally.) Again, if this is passed, farms will want a parity act on their buildings. Here is the reference structures:

- Page 8 of 29

(b) Cities and towns may tax forestry product operations buildings at a rate that reflects the actual costs incurred by the city or town in providing services to those buildings

H5098 has reasonable provisions to rectify actual (and unfortunately, perceived) inequalities in our Farm Forest Open Space legislation.

Unfortunately, as written, it will simply create additional problems. Please overhaul this Parity Act to reflect what is truly needed and ensure that you are not creating bigger problems for our small state.

Thank you,

Drake Patten
Hurricane Hill Farm

Selling Heritage Goods
Hosting Farm Events
Raising Leicester Longwool Sheep

www.hurricanehillfarm.com
Cranston RI
401 932 4884

Shave 'em to Save 'em!