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

Public Hearing Subject Matter	Position
Raised S.B. 950: AAC THE REPLACEMENT OF PUBLIC UTILITY POLES AND REVISING VEGETATION MANAGEMENT IN UTILITY PROTECTION ZONES.	Oppose
Raised S.B. 952: AAC CERTAIN SOLAR ENERGY PROJECTS.	Oppose Section 10

The Connecticut Forest & Park Association (CFPA) is the first nonprofit conservation organization established in Connecticut in 1895. For over 125 years, CFPA has offered testimony before the General Assembly on various State Park and Forest, trail recreation, sustainable forestry, and land conservation issues.

I am testifying today to express CFPA's concern about two raised bills on today's agenda: SBs 950 and 952.

SB 950: AAC the Replacement of Public Utility Poles and Revising Vegetation Management in UPZs

This is not a new issue to CFPA. In 2012, I served as the Chair of the State Vegetation Management Task Force (SVMTF), established through Governor Malloy's Two Storm Panel in the wake of tropical storm Irene and the October Nor'easter, to make recommendations on balancing Connecticut's need for reliable electricity with the continued management and enjoyment of our state's roadside forest. After we published our final SVMTF report in August, 2012, I worked as part of a small group, which included representatives from Eversource (then CL&P) and UI, to develop the concepts behind the so-called "Utility Protection Zone" and an orderly public notice process for municipalities, abutting landowners, and the EDCs to follow. These concepts were incorporated into P.L. 13-298 which updated Section 16-234 in the Connecticut statutes. There have been a few minor tweaks over the past 8 years to Sec. 16-234, but the overall public notice process for tree pruning and removals within the UPZ has generally remained intact since 2013.

If passed, SB 950 would undermine the regular public notice process in a significant way. Section 3 of this bill would dramatically expand the authority of EDCs beyond what is reasonable. This bill would enable EDCs to conduct tree trimming or removals as it deems necessary, either within or outside the UPZ, on land in the public right of way or on private land, and without following current law of first getting a permit from a municipal tree warden or provide notice to an abutting landowner.

SB 950 is unnecessary and is an over-reach. EDCs can propose, through the normal municipal permit process, to have additional authority to do tree pruning or removals along three phase mains. EDCs can also propose, through the normal municipal process, to have additional authority to address hazardous trees outside the UPZ that may have potential for endangering their infrastructure. SB 950 would enable EDCs to ignore local input from municipal tree wardens and abutting private landowners. We hope you will not allow this to happen.

SB 952: AAC the Certain Solar Energy Projects

For the last several years, the Department of Energy & Environmental Protection and the Department of Agriculture have worked to balance the need for more renewable energy with avoiding the damage that its development can cause to farmland soils as well as to forests and water quality.

Section 10 of SB 952 would heavily tip this balance toward solar energy development over farmland and forest protection, and we believe this is unnecessary as well as being bad policy especially considering our state's policy to protect farmland and the potential for farmland soils and forests to sequester and store carbon to help mitigate climate change.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify on these bills, and I'm glad to respond to any questions you may have.