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

Public Hearing Subject Matter	Position
Raised S.B. 1103: AN ACT CONCERNING EMISSIONS AND DECIBEL LEVEL TESTING, THE TAXATION OF CERTAIN MOTORCYCLES AND PARTS AND THE PASSPORT TO THE PARKS FEE.	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 in **opposition to Section 10 of SB 1103**, “An Act Concerning Emissions and Decibel Level Testing, the Taxation of Certain Motorcycles and Parts and the Passport to the Parks Fee.”

There are several reasons why we are opposed to Section 10 of SB 1103 which would restrict the Passport to the Parks Fee – a \$5/year/vehicle registration fee that we all pay at the DMV – to single car-owners only. That means that owners of multiple vehicles would no longer pay a fee on the additional vehicles they register.

It is fiscally irresponsible: Connecticut residents own an average of two cars per household. If each household paid a fee on only one vehicle, that would reduce the funding for State Parks by 50% or more. In response, Parks or campgrounds would have to be closed, or revert to over-reliance on the general fund portion of the state budget.

People are visiting State Parks more than ever: Over the past year, visitors to State Parks have increased by an estimated 10% or more. Every year since the Passport to the Parks began in 2018, more people have been getting to State Parks, and to cut State Park funding now (when both usage and facility needs are greater) makes no sense.

DMV systems are set-up to track fees per vehicle, not per individual: This legislation would require the DMV to incur significant costs to change its systems to be able to track the Passport to the Parks fee by individual. This would deepen the fiscal losses to the state that this bill would cause.

It is not fair: This would disproportionately put the burden of paying for State Parks on the backs of single car owners. Why should multiple car owners not have to pay the same reasonable fee on their additional vehicles?

The Passport to the Parks fee is reasonable: Multiple car owners can afford to pay a \$5/vehicle/year fee (equivalent to less than 2 gallons of gas). This fee is especially reasonable considering that before the Passport went into effect, just one weekend visit to a shoreline State Park would cost any Connecticut resident \$13/visit.

Before the Passport to the Parks, State Parks and campgrounds were on the brink of collapse: The Passport to the Parks went into effect in 2018 because 4 campgrounds had been closed and State Parks were threatened with moving to “passive management” (i.e. no people to keep parks and campgrounds safe). Going backward to a time not long ago when State Parks and campgrounds were threatened would be unacceptable.

If you exempt multiple car owners, what’s next? The current Passport to the Parks fee is fair because it applies equally to every vehicle owner. Exempting multiple car owners from paying this fee would open the floodgates for other groups to request an exemption, and the revenues generated by the Passport would be whittled away.

Hurting State Parks would hurt Connecticut’s economy and communities: In 2019, outdoor recreation in Connecticut contributed \$3.7 billion to our GDP, \$2 billion in private sector wages and salaries, and supported over 49,000 Connecticut jobs ([U.S Dept of Commerce: ORSA](#)). Investment in State Parks, trails, and other outdoor recreational resources is an economic force multiplier.

Please oppose Section 10 of SB 1103 and ensure that the Passport to the Parks stays intact, with no exemptions or diversions, as was proposed in the Governor’s FY 2022-23 Budget. Keeping the Passport to the Parks intact will help ensure Connecticut remains a special place for people to live, work, and play today, and stays that way for future generations to enjoy.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify, and I’d be glad to respond to any questions you may have.