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July 28, 2025

Sen. Rebecca L. Rausch, Senate Chair
Joint Committee on Environment & Natural Resources
State House, Room 215
Boston, MA 02133

Rep. Christine Barber, House Chair
Joint Committee on Environment & Natural Resources
State House, Room 167
Boston, MA 02133

via email: jointcommittee.environment@malegislature.gov

RE: S.2542 – An Act to build resilience for Massachusetts communities

Dear Chair Rausch, Chair Barber, and Members of the Committee:

On behalf of the Massachusetts Land Trust Coalition, I am pleased to submit written testimony in support of Senate Bill 2542, subject to recommended amendments described below. This letter expands upon oral testimony I presented at your July 15th hearing on this bill.

The Massachusetts Land Trust Coalition (MLTC) is a non-profit association that works to advance land conservation in Massachusetts by supporting and strengthening over 140 conservation land trusts that work to preserve vital natural resources across the Commonwealth. In addition to stewarding thousands of acres of their own land across Massachusetts, land trusts leverage their deep connections with communities and landowners to assist municipalities and state agencies to conserve open space.

S.2542 – An Act to build resilience for Massachusetts communities (Mass Ready Act) provides essential funding authorizations to ensure continued progress on the Commonwealth's resilience objectives. Once lost to development, open space is gone forever. With aging landowners and development pressure high, the next five years will prove pivotal to meet the Commonwealth's Clean Energy and Climate Goal to conserve 30% of its natural and working lands by 2030, and 40% by 2050 – and to secure all the other benefits of conserving and restoring natural lands, including drinking water protection, food security, biodiversity preservation, and equitable access to healthy outdoor recreation. To ensure we maximize this opportunity, **MLTC respectfully requests the Governor's proposed authorization for land conservation be increased from \$340.5 million to \$500 million.**

Here are details on the lines we propose for increase:

- SECTION 2C, line 2000-7082, For grant programs related to and investments in land, soil, water and natural resource conservation; open space preservation; and other capital expenditures that conserve land and natural resources. Given the pivotal role these grant programs play in facilitating land and water conservation projects undertaken by municipalities, tribes and land trusts, we request this line be increased from \$120 million to \$200 million, and that the MassTrails grant program be removed from this line and restored to its own separately capitalized item as was the case in the 2018 Environmental Bond. Trails funding serves distinct public access and recreation purposes and should be clearly distinguished from other conservation grant programs to ensure adequate funding for both.
- Section 2B, line 2300-0422. For land acquisition by the Department of Fish and Game. We request an increase from \$53.5 million to \$75 million.
- Section 2, line 2800-1123, For land acquisition by the Department of Conservation and Recreation. We request an increase from \$40 million to \$60 million.
- Section 2C, line 2000-7087, for acquisition and restoration of land by EEA and its departments and divisions. We request this line be increased from \$85 million to \$103 million.
- Section 2D, line 2511-0125. For preservation of agricultural land. We request an increase from \$42 million to \$62 million, and specifically request that the \$20 million increase be used to capitalize Mass. Department of Agricultural Resources' recently-granted Buy-Protect-Sell authority.

We also ask you to consider these comments regarding policy provisions in the *Mass Ready Act*:

- We strongly support language throughout the bill that makes non-profits newly eligible for various state grant programs. We especially applaud language in SECTION 72, which allows expenditure of up to 5% of the amount appropriated to state agencies for land acquisition to be used to reimburse non-profit conservation organizations for reasonable expenses associated with pre-acquisition of lands later transferred to the Commonwealth. These provisions acknowledge that longstanding reality that the Commonwealth won't reach its conservation goals without help from the land trust workforce.
- We also strongly support provisions in SECTIONS 16, 18 and 20 that will allow State agencies to exercise a Right of First Refusal – subordinate to the city or town's right and subject to consultation with state housing and economic development agencies -- on Ch. 61, 61A and 61B lands facing conversion to uses other than forestry, farming or recreation. This creates a powerful new tool for conserving lands of statewide significance when municipalities are not themselves in a position to act. It is essential to maintain language in these sections that requires properties acquired in this way to be made subject to open space protections under Article 97 of the Constitution.
- We support the streamlining of permitting for nature-based solutions projects as proposed in SECTIONS 31 (in re: Section 18D), 50, 51 and 74. We caution, however, that it is not advisable to extend all the same streamlining provisions (for example through SECTIONS 12

and SECTION 31, in re: Section 18E) to projects that permanently convert natural lands to hardened development— even for laudable goals such as much-needed clean energy and affordable housing development. The crises of climate and housing merit changes in *process* to make permitting more rapid, efficient and sustainable, but we must not sacrifice rational *standards* for ensuring that development doesn't harm wetlands and aquatic systems which provide important natural functions that enhance the resilience of communities. Further, we need to ensure that housing – and especially affordable housing -- isn't placed in locations at increased risk of flooding. The new energy siting law provides a framework for site suitability that avoids, minimizes and mitigates impacts to sensitive resources that should be a model for any revisions to permitting standards for housing development.

- We request addition of a new outside section to create a dedicated source of funding for conservation, modeled after H.901/S.597: *An Act providing nature for all*. This bill proposed to dedicate a portion of the state sales tax on sporting good and recreational vehicles to a fund dedicated to conserving land and water. Reliance on bond funding and other currently available sources has not been sufficient to keep Massachusetts on track to meet its conservation goals. Leveraging this existing revenue stream is a fiscally responsible way to sustainably fund nature-based climate solutions and ensure Massachusetts delivers on its conservation and climate commitments.

Thank you for your consideration. Alongside many coalition partners, we look forward to working with the Legislature to strengthen and refine this bill so it fully delivers for the environment and people of Massachusetts. If I can provide additional information or assistance, please don't hesitate to contact me at robb@massland.org.

Sincerely,



Robb Johnson
Executive Director, Massachusetts Land Trust Coalition