

1 **2023 NYSAC Legislative Conference**
2 **Standing Committee on Agriculture & Rural Affairs**
3 **Resolution #1**

4
5 **Resolution in Opposition to Alter the New York Soil and Water**
6 **Conservation District Law**
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8 **WHEREAS**, Soil and Water Conservation Districts (SWCDs) have existed for over 70
9 years in communities across New York State and were established to meet the needs of
10 the state’s diverse geographical regions with local leadership; and

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12 **WHEREAS**, SWCDs provide counties with a wide range of environmental services,
13 including watershed monitoring, soil health protection, sediment and erosion control,
14 stormwater management, invasive species mitigation; and

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16 **WHEREAS**, SWCDs strive to make programs and services that are inclusive and open
17 to everyone; and

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19 **WHEREAS**, state law establishes that each SWCD’s Board of Directors shall have two
20 members of the county board and three members who are not of the county board, two
21 of whom shall be practical farmers selected by the county Grange and county Farm
22 Bureau; and

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24 **WHEREAS**, this framework provides each county with the flexibility to select a Board
25 that meets its unique needs; and

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27 **WHEREAS**, the New York State Association of Counties (NYSAC) was notified that the
28 Watershed Health Coalition has proposed significant changes to Soil and Water
29 Conservation Districts Law without adequate input from local stakeholders; and

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31 **WHEREAS**, the proposed changes include a mechanism by which a District’s two
32 county board representatives may be removed and replaced via open election; and

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34 **WHEREAS**, the proposed changes include the revocation of the county Grange and
35 County Farm Bureau’s authority to appoint representatives; and

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37 **WHEREAS**, SWCD Board members from the county board, Grange, and Farm Bureau
38 provide local knowledge and experience to SWCDs that enable them to deliver valuable
39 conservation services to their communities; and

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41 **WHEREAS**, changing the structure of SWCD Boards could have a significant negative
42 impact on their ability to make decisions through informed partners on the very issues
43 that SWCDs deal with every day; and

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45 **WHEREAS**, the proposed changes would also impact local initiatives that counties
46 receive funding for through other sources and change how planning would be done, as
47 watersheds extend past county and municipal boundaries.

1 **NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED**, the New York State Association of
2 Counties (NYSAC) opposes any amendments to Soil and Water Conservation District
3 laws that would change the make-up, mission, and function of the State and County Soil
4 and Water Conservation Districts without local input; and

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6 **BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED**, that NYSAC urges the Legislature to seek input from
7 County Legislatures and Boards of Supervisors, the New York Farm Bureau, the New
8 York State Grange, the NYS Department of Agriculture and Markets, and SWCDs before
9 proposing changes to SWCD law; and

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11 **BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED**, that copies of this resolution be sent to the counties
12 of New York encouraging member counties to enact similar resolutions; and

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14 **BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED**, that NYSAC shall forward copies of this resolution to
15 Governor Kathy Hochul, the New York State Legislature, the Commissioner of
16 Agriculture and Markets, and all others deemed necessary and proper.