

Livingston County Board of Supervisors
Geneseo, New York



Resolution No. 2023-94

RESOLUTION OPPOSING PROPOSED CHANGES TO THE NEW YORK STATE SOIL AND WATER CONSERVATION DISTRICT LAW

WHEREAS, in the 1930s soil and water conservation districts were established in local communities throughout the United States in direct response to the environmental disaster of the Dust Bowl. In 1940, the New York State Soil and Water Conservation Districts Law (“Districts Law”) was enacted creating the State Soil Conservation Committee (“State Committee”) and authorizing counties to create local soil and water conservation districts (“Local Districts”) led by local leadership; and

WHEREAS, Local Districts currently provide all counties in New York State with environmental services, including but not limited to climate resiliency, watershed monitoring, soil health protection, sediment and erosion control, nutrient reduction, stormwater management, forestry management, water quality improvement, education and technical training, invasive species mitigation, green infrastructure, best management implementation, and technical assistance for private citizens, municipalities, and the State; and

WHEREAS, the New York Association of Conservation Districts recently alerted counties of an initiative attempting to drastically amend Article 2 of the Districts Law which specifically governs the State Committee and the creation of Local Districts; and

WHEREAS, the proposed legislative amendment significantly modifies the make-up, board size, and scope of work being performed by the State Committee and Local District boards; and

WHEREAS, the proposal changes the State Committee’s membership by increasing the number of members from five (5) to seven (7) and completely eliminates the authority of the New York State Grange (“the Grange”) to nominate a member for appointment. This power is instead granted to the Northeast Organic Farming Association of New York. In addition, one of the other members of the State Committee would have to be appointed from a combined nomination list submitted by other newly identified organizations, including but not limited to the state college of agriculture and life sciences at Cornell University and the college of environmental science and forestry of the state university of New York; and

WHEREAS, the legislative amendment also seeks to modify the make-up of Local District boards. While these boards would continue to consist of five (5) members, the three (3) members who are not representatives of the county board would be appointed from a combined list of nominees submitted by newly identified organizations, including but not limited to the New York State Soil Conservation Districts Association, Inc., the local office of Cornell Cooperative Extension, and the local chapter of the National Young Farmers Coalition. The proposed change specifically eliminates the ability of the county grange and the county farm bureau to independently nominate two (2) of the three (3) board members who are not representatives of the county board. Lastly, the proposal allows Local Districts to move from two (2) appointed county legislative representatives to an open election for these positions; and

WHEREAS, the legislative bill creates sweeping changes to the Districts Law that only benefits the organizations involved in drafting it. The proposal would marginalize Local Districts and empower various environmental groups. Projects already being developed or in a state of being completed may be jeopardized; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, that the Livingston County Board of Supervisors hereby strongly opposes the proposed legislative changes to the Soil and Water Conservation Districts Law due to the negative long term economic and environmental impacts to small communities; and be it further

RESOLVED, that the Clerk of the Board shall forward copies of this Resolution to Governor Kathy Hochul, Senator Pam Helming, Assemblywoman Marjorie Byrnes, the New York State Association of Counties and all others deemed necessary and proper.

Dated at Geneseo, New York
March 8, 2023
Public Services Committee