

Re: Senate Bill 857, Providing for Local Approvals for Certain Land Transactions

Chair Dush, Chair Santarsiero, and Members of the State Government Committee:

On behalf of The Nature Conservancy in Pennsylvania and our 34,000 members across cities, suburbs, and rural communities throughout the Commonwealth, we respectfully urge you to oppose Senate Bill 857.

Senate Bill 857 would require county and local approvals for land acquisitions by the Pennsylvania Game Commission, the Department of Conservation and Natural Resources, and the Fish and Boat Commission. Notably, no other state agencies or commissions are included in this proposed legislation.

Senate Bill 857 sets a troubling precedent for the interference with landowner intentions and rights across the Commonwealth. Conservation and property rights are core values that unite Pennsylvanians across political and regional lines. The Nature Conservancy regularly works with landowners who have spent decades—and sometimes generations—stewarding and expanding their lands, wishing to see those lands conserved in accordance with their values. In some cases, this intent is fulfilled by conveying that land, by direct gift or sale, or through intermediaries to our state resource agencies whom the landowner has identified as aligned with their intent. By imposing new approval requirements, Senate Bill 857 would allow interference with a landowner's right to gift or sell their land to the natural resource agency they've identified as best positioned to honor their legacy. Simply put, the process outlined undermines landowners' intentions, unfairly subjecting them to potentially lengthy and costly process to defend their intent.

Senate Bill 857 cites concerns about local tax revenue to justify the need for legislative action. However, an effective solution already exists: the Payment In Lieu of Taxes (PILT) program, which has been increased for state agencies twice in the past four years. If local governments seek to address revenue shortfalls from public landownership, PILT remains the appropriate mechanism.

Respectfully,



Evan R. Endres
Director of Government Relations and Policy
The Nature Conservancy in Pennsylvania