

Members of the Senate Finance Committee.

My name is Dora Vasquez-Hellner, Army Combat Veteran.

I am here today presenting this testimony in support of S2827 RELATING TO
TAXATION -- PROPERTY SUBJECT TO TAXATION

I respectfully ask for a favorable vote on S-2827. This act, Exempts certain urban and small farmers from sales taxes, real, tangible and personal property taxes and income taxes. This act would also define urban and small farmers and urban farmland.

Per the bill “Small farmer” is defined as the principal person engaged in agricultural operations on fewer than five (5) acres of land.

Since 1945 Rhode Island has lost over 80% of its farmland, dropping from approximately 300,000 acres to less than 60,000 acres remaining today. The decline is driven by the highest average farmland prices in the nation and severe pressure to convert agricultural property into residential or commercial development to include a sizeable amount of land dedicated to solar farms. With this challenge our state has experienced an influx of small farmers who have answered the call to practice sustainable farming and provide locally grown produce to our community. These small farmers sell their goods at local farmers

markets, farm stands and farmers co-ops which allows the consumer to track the origin of said products.

I would like to share some information with you about my small farmer, Tricia Lourenco Boucher, Growing Hope Farm, Army/Air Force Combat Veteran who resides in Wakefield with her husband and three children.

The reason Farmer Trish starting gardening was to help fight her PTSD battle! Gardening and farming are her passions because they help keep her mental health in track. That is also why she went back to school, so she could share as much as she could with others so they too can benefit from gardening! Words of Farmer Trish., “You don't have to be good at it for it to be good for you! Get out there and plant a flower and watch it bloom. It's magic for the soul.”

Boucher holds two degrees, Bachelor of Arts in Psychology, Rhode Island College and a Bachelor of Science Plant Science, Sustainable Crop Production, University of Rhode Island. Trish is also a graduate of the URI Master Gardener program.

For the past few years Trish has led the Boots 2 Bushels program at, a Market Garden Training program held through the University of Rhode Island Cooperative Extension. It is designed for beginning farmers, veterans and family members from across New England and especially caters to veterans who are considering farming as a new career choice.

Her commitment to teaching and farming is second nature for Trish. She developed Growing Hope Farm to a Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) program which delivers farm produce and cut flowers to subscribing families. The CSA members have the option to donate funding for delivery of fresh produce to local veterans experiencing food insecurity. Unfortunately, Trish is not here today to present her testimony as she is teaching her Boots to Bushels program at URI.

These small farmers are now under pressure and attack from local governments who are trying to shut down their farm stands due to current state law, which includes Farmer Trish. S 2827 addresses acceptable practices for small farmers to follow, recommended by the University of RI and US Dept of Agriculture. The bill sponsored by Senators Mack, Sosnowski, and DiPalma, has taken great care to address all aspects of the requirements and guidelines for small farmers to follow. These small farms help feed our communities, create jobs, increase local food access and therefore deserve the same support and respect as all farmers regardless of their acreage.

As previously mentioned, we Rhode Islanders have lost thousands of farming land over the years. We now have an opportunity to enact legislation that will greatly benefit and serve our community by redefining what constitutes a small farmer. You can support your constituents by voting in favor of S 2827 that will not only

grant citizens who have a desire to farm but will also provide a wider variety of produce that has been locally grown for our community.

In support of all the small farmers in our state, I am respectfully requesting your vote in favor of S 2827. Thank you