

Appropriations Committee
March 27, 2009

Testimony of David Leff, Board Member, Connecticut Forest & Park Association on SB 828, An Act Concerning State Revenue, and HB 6363, An Act Implementing the Governor's Budget Recommendations.

We oppose the portion of SB 828 which proposes that \$12 million in Community Investment Act (CIA) funds be redirected to the General Fund rather than be put toward the purposes for which the fund was established. Our opposition is for several reasons:

The CIA is Working: Over the past 3 years, the Community Investment Act has directly supported over \$35 million and leveraged another \$76 million for farmland protection, open space conservation, low income housing assistance, and historic preservation grants in 130 towns. The leverage and partnering attracted by the CIA Fund is one of the reasons why its continuance is so critical at the same time agency budgets and other funding sources are being cut.

The CIA is Partnership: The CIA is supported by a broad coalition of housing advocates, historic preservationists, conservationists, and farmers who joined forces with the General Assembly in a common and visionary goal of protecting and enhancing the unique character of Connecticut. This coalition fought hard to have a reliable dedicated fund that could be depended upon to make ongoing investments.

The CIA is Jobs: CIA fund projects not only have direct benefits, but also have multiplier effects through a significant "value chain" that benefits job creation and thoughtful community development statewide. These are quality of life investments that are necessary if Connecticut is to remain competitive.

The CIA is Self-Sustaining: It is remarkable that a \$30 transactional fee has raised such significant funding for conservation and other purposes. It will continue to raise funding without tinkering and will take on extra importance in times where dollars spent such investments will need to stretch farther than ever before. As far as land conservation is concerned, we are unlikely ever again to find better value for the dollar.

HB 6363 includes a provision to establish a Connecticut Conservation Corps, and we support this concept enthusiastically. Indeed, the prototype for the national Civilian Conservation Corps – which built steps, buildings, campgrounds, fire towers, and more during the Great Depression – was the outgrowth of a pilot program developed in Connecticut by some of our predecessors at CFPA.

Failing terrace walls at Gillette Castle State Park, a closed bridge at Natchaug State Forest, aging facilities at Hammonasset State Beach (where 3 maintenance staff currently provide upkeep for a 550-site campground and beach facilities utilized by over 1 million visitors each year), and various areas requiring maintenance along the 825-mile Blue-Blazed Hiking Trail System are just a few places where rehabilitation projects by a "new" CCC could make a big difference. Despite extreme hardship, the Great Depression was a golden age for conservation largely because of the CCC. We have a similar opportunity. Let's not let it pass by.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide this testimony.