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Government Administration and Elections Committee

March 16, 2009

Testimony of Martin Mador

In Opposition to

SB 839 An Act Concerning Mergers And Consolidations Of Various State Agencies
HB 6375 An Act Concerning Review And Termination Of Certain Boards And Commissions

I am Martin Mador, 130 Highland Ave., Hamden, CT 06518. I am the Legislative and Political Chair of the Connecticut Sierra Club, and am here today representing our 10,000 Connecticut members concerned about the health of our environment, our economic prosperity, and our quality of life. I possess a Master's of Environmental Management degree from Yale.

"In crisis there is opportunity". The Governor is a firm believer in this maxim. We know this because we see her taking the opportunity to dismantle every single watchdog office in state government. These are the people who keep a careful eye on the state agencies, at a cost of only a few dollars. Over the years, they have been extraordinarily successful in improving the quality of state government, and in keeping it honest. Sierra objects to the effort to disable the office which concerns environmental issues: the Council on Environmental Quality.

We suggest maintaining this perspective: When we emerge from the financial crisis now facing us, where to we want to be? What parts of government do we want to see still standing?

This appeared in the Dot column in the Courant today:

Due to the fiscal and energy crisis, the light at the end of the tunnel
has been extinguished. Sorry for the inconvenience.

I submit we're not that desperate. The watchdog agencies provide part of that illumination. Their absence would not be an inconvenience; it would be a tragedy for the people of Connecticut. Please leave their lights burning.

The CEQ has lived in tandem with the DEP for several decades. It has provided an invaluable service in bringing environmental issues to light, and in researching numerous comprehensive reports. It does this with minimal staff and resources, a volunteer Council, and a current budget of only \$170,000. Commissioner McCarthy, in testimony to the Appropriations Committee last month, praised the CEQ, and urged its continued existence as an office independent from DEP. Section 13 of SB 839 would, for all purposes, destroy the effectiveness of the office by placing it wholly within the agency it monitors, and deprive it of staff.

Section 1 of HB 6375 would terminate the Face of Connecticut Steering Committee. Sierra considers the Face of CT an important element in our efforts to preserve open space and farmland and make land use decisions which are environmentally favored. Maintaining the Committee, even in lean economic times, is a priority.