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TESTIMONY FOR THE GOVERNMENT ADMINISTRATION
& ELECTIONS COMMITTEE
PUBLIC HEARING, March 16, 2009

RE Connecticut Council on Environmental Quality And the Office of Consumer Counsel

Dear Sen. Slossberg, Rep. Spallone, and Honorable Members of the Committee:

Rivers Alliance is the statewide, non-profit coalition of river organizations, individuals, and businesses formed to protect and enhance Connecticut's waters by promoting sound water policies, uniting and strengthening the state's many river groups, and educating the public about the importance of water stewardship. Our 600 members include approximately 100 CT organizations and businesses.

Rivers Alliance of Connecticut strongly opposes the elimination of the Council on Environmental Quality (CEQ) proposed in HB 839, AAC Mergers and Consolidations of Various State Agencies. We recognize the need to achieve cuts and efficiencies in state programs. We know we must lose some good people and good programs. But CEQ delivers enormous value on a tiny budget. It is a model for state agency performance. We need to keep it if only to show other agencies what can be done with limited resources.

CEQ tracks and corrects environmental governance in the state. CEQ performs key functions that help to knit together the too often raveled implementation of environmental policies and rules. The Council:

- Reviews state-funded projects for consistency with environmental standards and implementation of mitigation plans.
- Publishes the Environmental Monitor, mandated by statute to provide public notice of state projects and opportunity for public comment.
- Serves as an ombudsman for all who are struggling with an environmental problem. This includes private citizens, groups, municipalities, legislators, and others. Typically CEQ negotiates a solution or at least clarifies what should be done.
- Prepares clear, detailed white papers on broad problems, such as breakdowns in wetlands protection and underfunding of the DEP.
- Proposes and reviews environmental legislation.
- Publishes a widely used, detailed annual report on the state of the environment in Connecticut and whether we are meeting our goals.

CEQ does its work, does it fast, and does it all for \$170,000 a year. The governor's budget proposes that DEP staff pick up CEQ's mandated tasks. So there will be little if any cost savings. But there will be a large loss in value. It will in fact be impossible for DEP to perform the role of CEQ. **Independence is essential to CEQ's work.** If CEQ is subsumed into DEP, it will become a rehearsed voice. It will have little authority and no credibility.

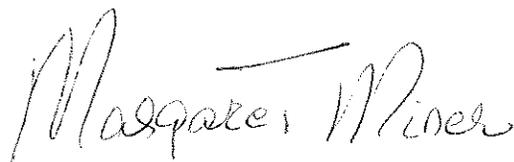
On another matter, we equally oppose the elimination of the Office of Consumer Counsel (OCC) proposed in HB 840.

Rivers Alliance of Connecticut, like many other groups, relies on OCC to assess and explain the impact of various energy proposals and practices on ratepayers. The Consumer Counsel serves with us on the Advisory Committee of the Water Planning Council, and is a key member of the Clean Energy Fund Board, which deals with hydropower, water cooling, and other major water-related issues.

Our understanding is that the OCC is self-sustaining. Therefore, there is no financial benefit to killing it. Moreover, there is no other government body in Connecticut with the authority, expertise, and will to represent ratepayers consistently. Ratepayers have gotten a rough deal in this state. We need the OCC to limit the damage and help turn the tide.

Thank you, and best wishes in this fantastically difficult budget season.

Margaret Miner,
Executive Director

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Margaret Miner". The signature is written in black ink and is positioned below the typed name and title.