

**Testimony of Keith Bishop
CT Vineyard and Winery Association
In Opposition to Proposed Budget Cuts**

Senator Harp and Representative Geragosian, and members of the Appropriations Committee, my name is Keith Bishop and I am here today on behalf of the CT Vineyard and Winery Association. We are an association made up of small wineries across the State of Connecticut comprising more than 1,500 acres of land. I am here in opposition to the proposed budget, most specifically the removal of funding for the CT Farm Wine Development Council.

The CT Farm Wine Development Council is vital to the sustainability and growth of the winery industry in Connecticut. The Council funds an essential program, called The Passport, which drives visitors to our businesses. It helps promote tourism and our niche market by advertising the vineyards and awards prizes to participants who go to each vineyard and get their Passport stamped. Once at the vineyard, customers engage in tastings and the purchase of wine by the bottle and case. We then submit the corresponding sales and excise tax back to the State. For many wineries more than 80% of their business can be attributed to the passport program. For each dollar spent funding the C Farm Wine Development Council (\$47,000 per year), CT Wineries give back ten- fold with the payment of sales and excise tax.

Farming in Connecticut is a difficult business to be in, but vineyards are one of the sectors that is growing and successful. Keeping a viable agricultural community is essential. It prevents land from being developed and drawing on the tax dollar instead of contributing the growth of the economy. I ask you to restore the funding for the Farm Wine Development Council. It is a small amount that goes a very long way in keeping the wine making industry in Connecticut successful.

The Connecticut Vineyard and Winery Association would also like to go on record as opposing the transfer of money from the Community Investment Act to the general fund. These funds provide numerous grants to agricultural businesses.

Thank you for your attention to this matter.