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## Citizens Campaign for the Environment Testimony on DEP and CEQ Funding

Thank you for opportunity to provide testimony today. My name is Emmett Pepper, and I am the Connecticut Program Director for Citizens Campaign for the Environment (CCE). CCE is an 80,000 member, non-profit, non-partisan advocacy organization working to protect public health and the natural environment in New York State and Connecticut.

Protecting the environment is not a luxury, it is a necessity. Connecticut's environmental programs have suffered from low levels of funding, as well as poorly structured funding mechanisms for years. Environmental protections and programs are a necessary part of the foundation for Connecticut's economy and the health and well being of its residents. It is important to note that as a proportion of the state budget, the Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) is allocated a much smaller percentage of the overall state budget than surrounding states. For instance, Rhode Island allocates 1.24% of it's state budget to environmental protection and state parks. New Jersey allocates .75%, New York .54% and Connecticut only .23%. Because of this inequity, it is prudent that the Governor did not apply as drastic of cuts to the DEP that other programs received. However, Connecticut's environment simply cannot sustain additional cuts to these already underfunded critical programs. DEP funding decreased by \$12 million in the Governor's proposed budget. **CCE requests that DEP funding be restored, at minimum, to the bare-bones \$161 million funding level from last year.**

We understand that, due to static incomes from fees and rising costs, many programs that are funded through fees are headed for a crisis and possible layoffs in the near future. The Governor is right to both de-link fee revenues from salaries and to increase fees. Unfortunately, the Governor's proposed solution to the fee issue is to sweep all fee revenues into the general fund. CCE is opposes this sweep and believe this will have negative consequences. In short, completely eliminating some dedicated funds amounts to a policy change, not just a funding restructuring. Examples of such dedicated funds includes the emergency spill response account, the municipal solid waste recycling trust account, and the underground storage tank petroleum clean-up account. Another account, the federal Clean Air Act account, also benefits the state by making reporting and accounting to the federal government easier. While CCE supports all DEP staff being funded through the general account, we oppose sweeping funds and fees used to fund specific projects and programs. Inadequate revenues from fees should necessitate appropriating additional funds from the general account or perhaps fee increases, not eliminating the dedicated funding stream.

Finally, there are two specific line items that CCE strongly believes should be restored in this budget, the Council on Environmental Quality and the Lobster V-Notch Program. The Council on Environmental Quality (CEQ), the state's environmental watchdog, provides information and oversight that is critical for keeping the state on track to reduce its environmental footprint. The independent research and reporting that the CEQ performs are of great benefit to the public and environmental groups. Eliminating the CEQ and requiring the DEP to be its own watchdog is nonsensical and will not save any money, assuming that the DEP actually performs the functions now performed by the CEQ. It seems that the more likely outcome is that the work of the CEQ would simply cease to exist. At a mere \$170,000, the CEQ is a bargain for the easy-to-read, informative information that it provides to the public and should be restored into the budget.

The Lobster V-Notch program is another low-cost, high-yield environmental program aimed at saving the lobster industry. This program is a win-win-win for the state by giving hands-on educational opportunity to students, conserving our natural resources and making a long-term investment in the economic recovery of the state's lobster industry. This program has provided Connecticut with the ability to lead by example in a meaningful effort to preserve not only our critical lobster industry but also a substantive part of our state's maritime culture. Students and lobstermen put V-shaped notches on the back of lobsters, which marks them as being illegal to take from the Sound. Lobstermen are compensated for the lobsters they notch and students learn about sustainability. Much of the expenses associated with this successful program were in-kind labor and volunteering done by students and lobstermen. The state covers insurance for the students, equipment and reimbursing the lobstermen for the lobsters they throw back. To get the largest impact, the program needs to continue and follow-through with past successes.

In summary, salaries should be funded completely from the general account. Projects and programs that are currently funded through special accounts should be allowed to continue. CEQ should stay an independent watchdog and the Lobster V-Notch program should also continue. The ability of the DEP to continue its programs is absolutely essential for the health and well-being of Connecticut's residents. DEP funding should be increased and certainly cannot afford to go any lower. CCE is simply asking you to maintain funding at last year's \$161 million during these economic hard times so the DEP can continue to squeak by. Thank you.