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TESTIMONY FOR THE APPROPRIATIONS COMMITTEE PUBLIC HEARING, FEBRUARY 17, 20

RE Connecticut Council on Environmental Quality And the Department of Environmental Protection

Dear Sen. Harp, Rep. Geragosian, and Honorable Members of the Committee:

I write today on behalf of the Rivers Alliance of Connecticut and the undersigned, who are dismayed that, in this difficult year, we may lose the highly cost-effective and much needed Council on Environmental Quality (CEQ). This independent, bi-partisan Council tracks and corrects environmental governance in the state. With admirable efficiency, CEQ performs key functions that help to knit together the too often raveled implementation of environmental policies and rules. CEQ

- 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 runs a lean, active operation. When have you heard complaints that CEQ doesn't answer its phone, or sits on work for months, or passes the buck to another agency? 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 supporting the agency. It will have little authority and no credibility.

Meanwhile, DEP itself continues to struggle with problems related to short funding. The environmental community came to this Committee last year for help. You grasped the problem and responded positively. We are still grateful, despite the reversal of fortune that came later. We also commend the governor for a new and more prudent approach to DEP funding. But we urge you to provide adequate dollars to support DEP's basic functions. We need DEP to be strong enough to guard our health and economic wellbeing. We cannot take clean water, clean air, good earth, safe parks, native plants and animals for granted. These valuable resources depend upon vigorous state stewardship. Keep the DEP on its feet, please.

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

SIGNATORIES

Margaret Miner, Rivers Alliance of Connecticut



I have read the proposed testimony prepared by Rivers Alliance for the Appropriations Committee with regard to saving CEQ and sustaining DEP funding and wish to add my own full endorsement, as well as an endorsement of the several hundred members of Friend of Goodwives River.

Richard Windels, President, Friends of Goodwives River, Inc.

Housatonic Valley Association, Lynn Werner, Executive Director

Betty J. Lovastik, Friends of the Five Mile River, New Canaan

Susan Masino, Simsbury

Steep Rock Association, Washington, CT, Susan Branson, Executive Director

David Morse, Mansfield

Duffy Schade, Glastonbury

Sarah Lee Martin, 15 Gunn Hill Road, New Preston, CT 06777

Dr. and Mrs. Larry DiFabrizio, 59 Barnes Road, Washington, CT 06777

Naubesatuck Watershed Council, Denise Burchsted

Christopher Phelps, Program Director, Environment Connecticut

Hugh Rawson, Roxbury, Member, Conservation Commission
