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Government, Administration and Elections Committee
Legislative Office Building, Room 2200
Hartford, CT 06106

Representative Spallone, Senator Slossberg and esteemed members of the Government, Administration and Elections Committee:

I am writing you today to voice my opposition to the land swap identified in Section 19 of Proposed Bill 5520. I attended the Public Hearing earlier this week, accompanying the Chairman and staff of the Connecticut River Gateway Commission who did testify, also in opposition to Section 19.

Although I am a member of the Gateway Commission, its Vice-Chairman in fact, I am commenting as an individual, but my comments are formed by my experience on Gateway and my commitment to Gateway's mission.

I believe the testimony (verbal and written) of J. Melvin Woody and J.H. Torrance Downes should provide you with an understanding of the mission of Gateway. The Connecticut River has been well recognized for its scenic value; it is one of the few rivers of its size in this country which has been kept in a relatively natural state. We are lucky, indeed, that the mouth of the river had too much silting for a port to be developed. The citizens of Connecticut today are able to enjoy a river experience unlike many others, thanks to this quirk of nature.

Having heard the testimony, I found it curious that the only individuals speaking in favor of this transaction on Friday had a personal financial interest as business partners who would receive the 17 acres which overlook the Connecticut River. Not one of them mentioned that the land which they wanted transferred from the State to them was in the Gateway Conservation Zone and that the Higganum land which they are offering in its place was not, other than for a tiny triangle at its easternmost point. (It is also my understanding that much of the eastern portion of this Higganum land is not developable -- or particularly expensive to develop-- and would therefore remain in a natural state even if it were not a part of Cockaponset.)

Although the two acres being offered by Goodspeed to "sweeten the pot" is riverfront, it is of little scenic value and may even be restricted by an easement. It is not contiguous to other protected land. Furthermore, it is of such little value to the State and Department of

Environmental Protection that the State sold it to Goodspeed as part of a larger parcel for \$1.00.

Most importantly, the integrity of preserving land for conservation purposes is at risk should this swap be allowed. If the seventeen acres of land which DEP has held were to be transferred to private owners and used for development of any kind, any future purchases of land for conservation purposes would be jeopardized. Gifts of land to Gateway, and thus DEP, would be that much more difficult to realize since a donor would understandably be skeptical that the land would remain natural forever.

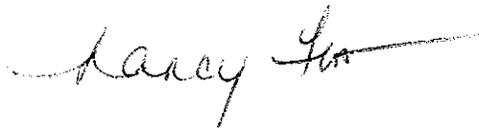
I realize the formula used for land swaps involves monetary value, but I ask you to address the issue of non-monetary value. The 17 acres is of immeasurably greater value to the Gateway Conservation Zone than the acres being offered in trade by Mr. Rocco and his partners.

Of course I have concerns as to what development plans Mr. Rocco has for the seventeen acres. A large structure, such a theater twice the size of Goodspeed, located east of the Riverhouse catering facility which Mr. Rocco owns would not be in keeping with the traditional river scene which Gateway is charged with perpetuating. Therefore, any transfer of this land to private ownership should include deed restrictions to ensure that the area of the old sand pit and the slope remain natural or are developed in a scale which is appropriate to the riverway scene.

It has been noted that the seventeen acres includes invasive species. If that were the criteria for land not be valuable for conservation, then much of the protected shoreline of the Connecticut River which is overgrown with phragmite and bittersweet would be eligible for trade to private owners. I do not believe anyone would consider that appropriate.

I do thank you for your thoughtful consideration of this matter, and do ask that you remove Section 19 from this bill. Please do consider the fact that the Commissioner of the Department of Environment Protection has advised that she is not supportive of this bill. And, I do invite you to join the Gateway Commission on its annual river cruise later this year so that you can see for yourselves what a special resource the Connecticut River and its viewscape are.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Nancy Gio", with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.