

**Testimony of Melissa Spear  
Executive Director of Common Ground  
358 Springside Avenue, New Haven, CT 06515  
To the Legislative Appropriations Committee  
Submitted March 11th, 2010**

Honorable Chair Toni Harp, Members of the Appropriations Committee;

I am testifying today in my capacity as Executive Director of Common Ground, a unique urban environmental center located in New Haven that includes an environmentally themed charter high school, an environmental education center offering programs to a diverse community of children, young people and adults throughout the region, and an urban farm that produces over 5000 lbs of healthy food every season for the New Haven community.

I am writing to ask you to protect Community Investment Act funds from cuts being proposed in recent budget mitigation plans. Community Investment Act funds support a broad array of very effective programs that leverage additional public and private investments to create jobs, revitalize our urban centers, protect critical natural resources, and ensure the viability of Connecticut's agricultural economy.

An excellent example of one of these programs is the Department of Agriculture's Agricultural Viability Grant program which is funded entirely through the Community Investment Act. Common Ground was fortunate to be awarded an Agricultural Viability Grant in 2010 that will allow us to construct a "harvest pavilion" where we can more efficiently process the produce we grow on site for use in our school lunch program and for sale at local farmer's markets. Since 2006, over \$4 million in Agricultural Viability Grants have been awarded across the state. These grants target projects that increase the agricultural capacity of our state by improving the production and distribution of agricultural products. Investments made through the Agricultural Viability Grant program ensure agriculture remains an important economic engine in Connecticut and that residents of our state, whether urban, suburban or rural, have access to healthy, locally grown food. By supporting improvements to our agriculture infrastructure, Community Investment Act funds protect the quality of life that make Connecticut a great place to live, work and visit. Let's not be shortsighted by eliminating even investments, like those being made with Community Investment Act funds that directly improve our state's economy in both the short and long term. Please protect the Community Investment Act and all that it does for our state.

Thank you.

Melissa Spear  
Executive Director  
Common Ground  
203-389-4333