

Connecticut State Grange

WRITTEN TESTIMONY ONLY

TESTIMONY OF THE CONNECTICUT STATE GRANGE IN OPPOSITION TO DIVERSION OF THE COMMUNITY INVESTMENT ACT FUNDS

MARCH 11, 2010

The Connecticut State Grange opposes any transfer of the Community Investment Act funds away from their intended purpose of preserving prime agricultural land, preserving open space, historic preservation and the provision of affordable housing as proposed by Governor Rell.

On a percentage basis, Connecticut is losing its prime and important agricultural lands to development faster than any other state in the United States. Urban sprawl is also encroaching on our open space lands at an alarming rate. Recognizing these problems, in 2005 the General Assembly passed the Community Investment Act to provide funding to preserve farmland and open space along with affordable housing and historic preservation through a surcharge on all instruments recorded in our land records. Now Governor Rell is proposing to transfer these funds away from their intended purpose.

Agriculture in Connecticut is a \$2 billion dollar industry that provides approximately 50,000 permanent full time jobs. But agriculture cannot exist without the extensive land base needed to raise our crops and pasture our animals. Given the current level of State funding for farmland preservation, the best estimate is that all of our farmland will either be preserved through development rights easements or be irretrievably lost to development within the next fifteen years. We need to preserve our farmland and we need to preserve it NOW.

The funding provided through the Community Investment Act has increased farmers interest in selling their development rights to the State. The Department of Agriculture has hired and trained new employees to handle the increased volume of work. At present, three of the five positions in the Farmland Preservation section of the Department of agriculture are funded through the Community Investment Act. If the Community Investment Act funds are diverted to other uses, the most likely scenario will be a drastic decrease in the rate at which the State preserves its remaining farmland and the loss of the employees who have the necessary expertise to operate this vital program. When farmers find there are no funds to purchase the development rights to their land within a reasonable time frame, many will be forced to sell part or all of their land to developers to meet their necessary bills. We cannot afford to let this happen.

Under the current economic conditions the State of Connecticut needs to leverage all the federal and private funding it possibly can. In the four years the Community Investment Act funds have been available to the Department of Agriculture, \$36 million in Community Investment Act funding had leveraged approximately \$76 million in a combination of federal, private and in-kind matches. This is a ratio of slightly more than two dollars leveraged for every State dollar expended. We cannot afford to lose leverage funds at this ratio by diverting the Community Investment Act funds to other purposes.

Connecticut is currently experiencing the highest rates of unemployment in many years, as are most of the other states. The Community Investment Act currently provides \$1 million annually for the agriculture viability grants, \$100,000 annually for the Connecticut Grown marketing program and \$75,000 annually for the Connecticut Farm-Link program. These programs support the viability of our farms and promote the growth of the agriculture sector of our economy which in turn supports current employment and promotes new jobs for approximately 50,000 Connecticut residents, many of whom are low and moderate wage earners. We cannot afford the loss of many of these jobs as a consequence of diverting the Community Investment Act funds away from their original purpose.

On behalf of the 4,000 Grange members throughout Connecticut, many of whom have farmed their land for generations, I urge the General Assembly to leave the Community Investment Act funds as they are so we will be able to produce the food and fibre necessary for all the residents of Connecticut.

Thank you for your consideration of my testimony.

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