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TESTIMONY FOR THE APPROPRIATIONS COMMITTEE PUBLIC HEARING FEBRUARY 24, 2011

To: Chairman Sen. Toni Nathaniel Harp & Chairman Rep. Toni E. Walker
And to the Members of the Committee:

RE Connecticut Council on Environmental Quality

Rivers Alliance of Connecticut is the statewide, non-profit coalition of river organizations, individuals, and businesses formed to protect and enhance Connecticut's waters by promoting sound water policies, uniting and strengthening the state's many river groups, and educating the public about the importance of water stewardship. Our 450 members include almost all of the state's river and watershed conservation groups, representing many thousand Connecticut residents.

Thank you for the opportunity to remark on the proposed budget before us tonight. We look forward to a turn in the road for Connecticut and thank you for your work to get us to our goals. We at Rivers Alliance, however, urgently ask you not to defund the Council on Environmental Quality (CEQ), and to save its ability to function as a steward of the state's environment and a resource for its citizens and towns.

I have followed the activities of CEQ for some ten years, and am certain that it has saved the state tens of thousands of dollars through settling disputes, helping citizens navigate the difficulties of multi-agency negotiations, warning of problems (such as UConn's water shortage), reviewing state-funded projects, tracking and reporting on the state's progress with respect to its environmental goals, writing white papers on high-profile problems (such as the report *Swamp'd* on inconsistencies in wetlands conservation), proposing needed legislation, and assisting in improving proposed legislation.

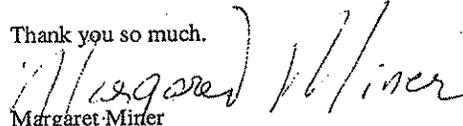
Some ten years ago, CEQ commissioners and staff put in many long hours and made field trips to help the University of Connecticut deal with a range of problems that were prompting angry complaints from residents in the region. Today UConn boasts high environmental standards. Last year, CEQ came to the rescue of the Town of

Oxford and its Economic Development Director, who was caught in a maddening catch-22 with respect to expansion of the Oxford Airport. And every month in between, CEQ has responded to the needs of people around the state. It is the only recourse for citizens who want to point out an environmental problem and find a solution.

I believe that Senator Rob Kane would agree that in the matter of Oxford Airport, CEQ showed that it acts without bias (just in case the Committee members were to think that CEQ only helps tree huggers and fish people like me).

There may be ways to streamline administrative aspects of CEQ, and we would be happy to assist in this. But I firmly believe that there is no better bargain in state government than CEQ. The budget line is tiny compared to its mission. Somehow CEQ gets the job done with present staff and excellent commissioners. But the job cannot be done without this staff.

Thank you so much.


Margaret Miner
Executive Director