

# CONNECTICUT Land Conservation Council

Testimony submitted by: Amy Blaymore Paterson, Esq., Executive Director

February 20, 2013

Appropriations Committee

## **H. B. No. 6350: An Act Concerning the Budget for the Biennium Ending June 30, 2015, and Other Provisions Relating to Revenue**

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### STAFF

Amy B. Paterson, Esq.  
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Senator Harp, Representative Walker, and Members of the Appropriations Committee:

Thank you for this opportunity to present testimony on behalf of the Connecticut Land Conservation Council (CLCC).

CLCC works with land trusts, other conservation and advocacy organizations, government entities and landowners to increase the pace, quality and scale of land conservation in Connecticut while assuring the perpetual, high quality stewardship of conserved lands in the state. As Connecticut's umbrella organization for the land conservation community, CLCC focuses on building land trust capacity and sustainability, leading a unified land conservation voice for public policies that support land conservation, and engaging broad constituencies to foster a deep understanding of the benefits and need for land conservation. CLCC is guided by a Steering Committee with statewide representation.

CLCC submits this testimony on the Governor's Budget in connection with three conservation priorities:

1. Opposition to the Diversion of Community Investment Act Funds
2. Managing and Protecting State Parks and Forests
3. Maintaining the Independence of the Council on Environmental Quality

### **Opposition to the Diversion of CIA Funds**

CLCC opposes the budget proposal which would divert \$1 million per quarter (\$4 million annually) from the Community Investment Act (CIA) to the Department of Education's "Healthy Foods Initiative". Although this is a worthy program, CLCC and our CIA partners strongly contend that it should not be funded through the CIA.

**The CIA was enacted to fund four specific land use programs which support the economy and create jobs.** Enacted with tremendous bipartisan support in 2005 to address the social and environmental impacts of suburban sprawl, the CIA provides increased funding for state programs for **open space, farmland/dairy production, historic properties and affordable housing.** Funded by a surcharge on recording fees, the impact of the CIA on the economic well-being and overall quality of life in our communities has exceeded all expectations. Virtually every town in Connecticut has benefited from the CIA.

According to figures compiled by a statewide coalition of organizations representing the CIA program sectors, approximately \$85,318,000 in CIA funds has been invested in Connecticut from 2006-2012. Considering that there is *at least* a one to one match with private funds, this means total investment in our towns and cities of approximately \$170,636,000.

In addition, the CIA investments in local farm businesses and land protection have contributed to the viability of the \$873 million outdoor recreation industry and the \$3.5 billion agricultural

industry together generating 28,000 jobs. Over 2,000 jobs were created in the affordable housing and historic preservation sector due to CIA projects, and 157 dairy farm businesses were saved with CIA support.

**The CIA is critical to land conservation.** For the conservation community, CIA funding is the only *consistent* source of funding for the state's Open Space & Watershed Land Acquisition (OSWLA) program – the state's only matching grant program for land trusts, towns and water companies seeking to conserve open space. Since its inception, the CIA has funded eighty-eight (88) acquisitions through the OSWLA program, permanently protecting 2,707 acres of open space and fifteen (15) Community Gardens, at a cost of \$15,267,477. (2011 Annual Report to the Environment Committee May 2012) The 2012 grants which were announced by Governor Malloy at the end of last year would permanently protect another 2,730 acres.

The CIA funding is essential to the viability of the OSWLA program and the land conservation community's ability to help the state meet the statutory goal set forth in Connecticut General Statutes Section 23-8(b) of conserving 21% of the state lands by the year 2023. Yet the funds generated by the CIA fall far short of the needs existing in not only the OSWLA program but in the programs under the other three CIA funded sectors as well.

In conclusion, the diversion of CIA funds to other programs, no matter how worthy, threatens the level and integrity of the funding available for the programs for which the CIA was created – land use programs with few, if any, other sources of funding -- and sets a very dangerous precedent for future dilution of the fund. On behalf of CLCC and the land conservation community, we respectfully request that the funding of the Healthy Foods Initiative be funded not through the CIA but rather as a stand-alone line item under the Department of Education budget.

#### **Managing and Protecting State Parks and Forests**

CLCC is committed to supporting the Department of Energy and Environmental Protection (DEEP) natural resources programs to ensure the proper stewardship, management and inventorying of state conservation lands. We are therefore extremely concerned that the proposed budget for DEEP's natural resources program would further devastate the department's already burdened ability to manage state parks and forests and concur with the recommendations set forth in the testimony of the Connecticut Forest & Park Association (CFPA).

According to information submitted by CFPA, due to recent cuts to seasonal state park workers and continued attrition, several state parks will either not be opened, or will have services reduced in 2013. The Governor's proposed budget would cut funding necessary to hire seasonal workers who are critical to the operation of the state park system. Furthermore, the planned layoffs of three DEEP durational foresters in April 2013 will leave the DEEP Forestry Division without the staff it needs to properly implement state forest management plans, which are essential to the overall environmental health and economic well-being of our state forest system.

We contend that these short term budget cuts will do little to ease the state's overall budget problems and will serve to further undermine the long term economic benefits that the state receives from its state park system.

#### **Maintaining the independence CEQ**

CLCC opposes the recommendation to consolidate CEQ into the Office of Governmental Accountability. CEQ is the state's independent watch-dog agency that the public relies upon to monitor environmental progress, assess the efficacy of state environmental laws, policies and programs, and investigate alleged violations of environmental laws. Consolidation would eliminate the CEQ's unique position of independence and undermine its ability to carry out its mission on behalf of the public interest.

Thank you for this opportunity to testify on behalf of CLCC, its members, and the conservation community.