



## State of Connecticut

### HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES STATE CAPITOL

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MEMBER  
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*Testimony by Representative Melissa Ziobron  
Before the Legislative Program Review and Investigations Committee  
On PRI Study on State Parks and Forests: Funding  
September 26, 2013*

State Park funding, or really the lack of funding is an important issue in my district-which is why I am here before you today.

Just last night, there was a public hearing in my community hosted by DEEP regarding Sunrise State Park. This Park is the ultimate example of what happens to State Parks in communities like mine, when staff resources at DEEP are stretched to the breaking point. For over seven years this property and the 86 buildings on site were essentially abandoned because of lack of resources. Subsequently, my community faced the consequences of this action. Arson, outrageous forms of vandalism, illegal activity-including drug and alcohol consumption on site, trespassing and theft became the hallmarks of this once thriving resort, turned State Park. Fortunately, last year bonding money was set aside for the unfortunate, but necessary demolition of all but three historic buildings. The Park is now almost completely safe for my constituents to enjoy once again. My constituents are concerned that just because it is clean today does not mean it will stay that way. One person asked when we discussed an upcoming Community Clean-Up day for next month: "what promises do I have that if I spend my time there, that the site will be maintained?" That is a good question and the answer will hinge on the funding for adequate staff at DEEP. We are lucky that a few dedicated individuals are willing to form a Friends of Sunrise State Park to keep advocating for this property. The continuing reality is that without Friends support across the State, our park system deficiencies would be very visible and glaring.

My district which encompasses East Haddam, East Hampton, and parts of Colchester is one of the most picturesque in the State. It is home to almost a dozen State Parks and State Forests. As the former President of Friends of Gillette Castle State Park, I know firsthand what the staff based at Gillette Castle is faced with as they try to maintain these wonderful assets. They are not

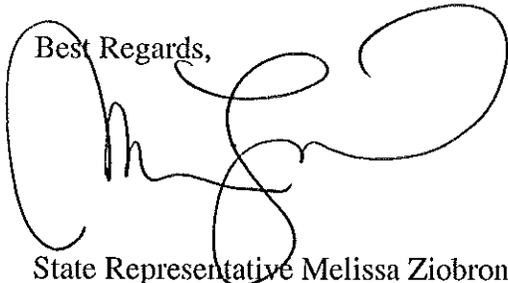
only responsible for Gillette, but for numerous other State Parks in my district. I appreciate their hard work, but recognize that more man hours are needed. As a member of the Appropriations Committee, I took part in discussions regarding finding new ways to support these critical assets. We spoke about license plate fees, parking fees, expanded concessions agreements, corporate sponsors, special event fess—basically everything but the kitchen sink. As an avid user of the State Park system, I see firsthand how this lack of funding is putting our users at risk. For example, on the Airline Trail Linear Park there is a portion near the Jeremy River which has washed away. I watched with a mother's fear as my own son lost control of his bike and crashed. We have trails at Devil's Hopyard which are not blazed clearly—confusing hikers. At Day Pond State Park, our handicap access is over-run with lily pads causing those who want to fish to use an area that is unsafe for the wheelchair that are using. In Machimoodus State Park, we have had a rash of break-ins to vehicles. At Salmon River State Forest, there is a building which could be utilized for rentals—but has been closed now for years because the condition of the kitchen and bathrooms are not useable. Comstock Bridge just went through a beautiful upgrade, but the new plantings that were installed there are covered with weeds and are completely overgrown. Outside my district at both Hammonasset and Rocky Neck, which are campgrounds I have used every year for the last twelve; there are bathrooms that are unsanitary, litter left all over our beaches and lifeguards who can only patrol one small area, while leaving another unsafe.

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Something must change.

I look forward to being part of that solution and thank you for your time.

Best Regards,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Melissa Ziobron', written in a cursive style. The signature is positioned below the text 'Best Regards,' and above the printed name 'State Representative Melissa Ziobron'.

State Representative Melissa Ziobron