



## State of Connecticut

### HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES STATE CAPITOL

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MEMBER  
APPROPRIATIONS COMMITTEE  
ENVIRONMENT COMMITTEE  
PUBLIC HEALTH COMMITTEE

#### Program Review and Investigations Committee Public Testimony Tuesday, March 4, 2014

#### TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF HB 5370 AN ACT IMPLEMENTING THE RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE PROGRAM REVIEW AND INVESTIGATIONS COMMITTEE CONCERNING THE PERFORMANCE OF CONNECTICUT'S STATE PARKS AND HB 5369 AN ACT IMPLEMENTING THE RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE PROGRAM REVIEW AND INVESTIGATIONS COMMITTEE CONCERNING CERTAIN FISCAL AND RESOURCE-RELATED MATTERS PERTAINING TO STATE PARKS

Dear Senator John Kissel, Representative Mary Mushinsky, Senator John Fonfara,  
Representative Christie Carpino, and esteemed members of the Program Review and  
Investigations Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to testify before you today. I am going to be speaking in support  
of two bills, **HB 5370** and **HB 5369**. While both bills are a good start for the future of our State  
Park system, I believe they do not do enough to ensure our parks for future generations. I have  
taken the liberty of suggesting changes below. The changes in both bills would prioritize our  
State Parks and provide for the funding they deserve.

#### **HB 5370**

This bill brings forward a RBA report card which is a fabulous tool that will benefit our parks  
and assist the staff in quantifying the benefits of our parks and those who use them. But, I  
believe Section 3 should go beyond what is before us. I believe the following changes would be  
beneficial:

*Sec. 3. (NEW) (Effective from passage) Biennially, the Commissioner of Energy and Environmental Protection shall develop a budget request of the General Assembly for the Department of Energy and Environmental Protection that relies upon the receipt {of not less than twenty-five per cent and not more than fifty per cent} of state park generated revenues for the funding of such state parks in addition to any amount of state revenues budgeted for such parks in the previous biennial state budget. Concomitantly, the Bureau of Outdoor Recreation, within the Department of Energy and Environmental Protection, shall develop a plan for the use of such state park generated revenues that distributes such revenues in a manner that balances the needs of the entire state park system with the needs of the state parks that generated such revenues. Such plan shall be updated every five years and submitted to the joint standing committees of the General Assembly having cognizance of matters relating to the environment and appropriations and the budgets of state agencies.*

**HB 5369**

This bill concept recognizes the significant capital and maintenance costs that will occur with the construction of new and very popular rental cabins. I camp in a spot very close to the new ones at Hammonasset State Park and am pleased to see the recognition of the needed operating costs to maintain them in a good condition.

*Section 1. Section 23-10b of the general statutes is repealed and the following is substituted in lieu thereof (Effective July 1, 2014):*

*The Commissioner of Energy and Environmental Protection may provide outdoor recreation-related services to the public at state park and forest recreation areas. Such services may include rentals of bicycles, boats, cabins and tents, sale of firewood and operation of camp stores supplying camping necessities. Fees for such services shall be set by the commissioner, according to market value. Revenue from such services shall be deposited in the Conservation Fund and credited to an enterprise program account for use in the state park and forest facilities, except the commissioner, in accordance with section 23-15b, as amended by this act, {may} shall allocate a portion of such revenue from the rental of any cabin for deposit in the maintenance, repair and improvement subaccount for the state park where such cabin is located. Such services and fees shall not affect admission, parking, camping and related existing fees. No services shall compete with a concessionaire under contract with the Department of Energy and Environmental Protection at the time such service is offered.*

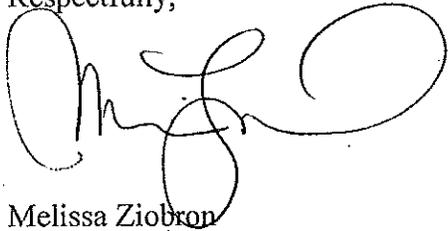
As a the former President of the Friends of Gillette Castle State Park, I can tell you firsthand about the growing dependency that our park system has on Friends group around Connecticut. I had the pleasure of testifying before you last fall as you were in your research phase. The sentiments that I shared with you then, are the same today.

One of the clearest examples of this dependency is a purchase that occurred several months before I took on the role of President. The Friends group purchased a snowplow for the maintenance at the park which should be an item that is purchased by the State. During my tenure, we purchased the items needed to alter the meeting room into a viewing room, held an Easter Egg Hunt and provided the structure needed to support a wonderful theater production all

summer long. There is a difference there between necessities and enhancements. We should be allowing Friends groups to focus their limited resources on the latter.

In addition, I have with me a State Park Passport from the State of Maine that I also believe could be useful to DEEP and the Parks division. It would be a wonderful tool to complement the existing programs that exist. We need to encourage visitation to our parks, but we should do so knowing that they are ready for that visit and have their best face for our visitors and residents alike. I would also recommend taking the \$200,000 set aside for a "free day" at our parks and instead invest that in additional seasonal staff to accomplish tasks that have been delayed for years.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Melissa Ziobron', written in a cursive style with large loops.

Melissa Ziobron

State Representative

34<sup>th</sup> District