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LANDS  
ALLIANCE**

A Project of American Farmland Trust

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**Testimony Opposing HB 6825 Section 5**

Appropriations Committee

Submitted by: Lisa Bassani, Project Director, Working Lands Alliance

April 21, 2015

Senator Bye, Representative Walker, and Committee members:

The Working Lands Alliance appreciates this opportunity to submit testimony in **strong opposition to Section 5 of HB 6825**, An Act Making Deficiency Appropriations and Addressing the Deficit for the Fiscal Year Ending June 30, 2015.

The Working Lands Alliance is a broad-based, statewide coalition dedicated to preserving Connecticut's farmland, and includes such organizations as American Farmland Trust, CT Forest & Park Association, CT Farmland Trust, End Hunger CT!, CT Farm Bureau, CT Land Conservation Council, among many others. Our efforts focus on increasing the pace of farmland preservation in the state and advancing the economic viability of Connecticut agriculture.

**Our coalition strongly opposes Section 5 of HB 6825, which proposes to divert \$15.2 million from the Community Investment Act to address the budget deficit for the current fiscal year.** This proposed diversion is in addition to the complete sweep proposed for the Community Investment Act from January 1, 2016 through June 30, 2017 – and taken together represent a devastating double blow to the CIA account.

The results of the CIA legislation – passed in 2005 with bipartisan support – are undeniable. In fact, the impact of the Community Investment Act has exceeded all expectations. Over the last decade, CIA has made over \$133 million in investments spread across nearly every community in the state (to date, over 1100 projects in 168 municipalities). The kinds of investments range from the protection of prime farmland in the small town of Columbia, to preservation of historic sculptures in Hartford's Bushnell Park, to the protection of needed farmland and open space in one of the most urban parts of Bloomfield, to the development of supportive, affordable housing for disabled veterans in Jewett City. The list of worthwhile projects goes on and on, and continues to grow as new investments are funded through CIA.

Yet these kinds of investments across this state would cease if the legislature accepts the proposal to raid these dedicated funds to address budget deficits. We respectfully remind this committee that forward-thinking legislation was structured to provide a dedicated funding source for these worthwhile investments, so that these efforts across the 4 sectors were not dependent on unreliable bond funding or subject to cuts during difficult budget seasons. Thus, our state continues investing in our farm businesses, open space, historic structures, and downtown centers even during difficult budget years, like the ones we are facing at the moment.

Section 5 of HB 6825 proposes to divert \$10 million in CIA funds from the Open Space and Watershed Land Acquisition grant program (OSWA), \$5.1 million from historic preservation efforts, and \$100,000 from the CT Food Policy Council. The efforts to protect needed open space are lagging behind and the Council on Environmental Quality reported that the state is not on track to meet its goal of protecting 21% of our land base by 2023. The Council further states that we must dramatically increase the acreage we are protecting annually between now and 2023 if we are to meet this statutory goal – and yet this proposal (coupled with the sweep for FY 16 and 17) would virtually eliminate the only consistent source of funding for the OSWA Program. This proposal also derails our efforts to address the inequities in our food system by eliminating the funding for the CT Food Policy Council.

This Committee should resist the urge to address budget deficits on the back of a dedicated fund – particularly the one that is reinvesting in our communities, creating jobs, improving our quality of life, and attracting residents and visitors to the state. To quote the Hartford Courant’s recent editorial on the sweep of CIA, “To raid them [dedicated funds] is to violate the public’s trust, to make them ‘no-trust’ funds.” We agree.

**On behalf of the Working Lands Alliance, I urge this committee to oppose Section 5 of HB 6825.**