



## CONNECTICUT RIVER WATERSHED COUNCIL

*The River Connects Us*

Lower Valley: deKoven House, 27 Washington St., Middletown, CT 06457

### **For the Conservation and Development Appropriations Subcommittee**

#### **Testimony of Alicea Charamut, Lower River Steward**

**March 5, 2015**

*The Connecticut River Watershed Council is the principal nonprofit environmental advocate for protection, restoration, and sustainable use of the Connecticut River and its watershed.*

#### **Funding for the Council on Environmental Quality**

Please reinstate the \$180,000 needed to fund the Council on Environmental Quality. The Council's autonomy to objectively report on environmental issues and attend to citizen's concerns must be left entirely intact. We believe that in order for the Council to maintain this autonomy, it must remain housed administratively within DEEP and not under the jurisdiction of the Office of Legislative Management where the Council would not have control over the hiring and firing of its own staff.

Navigating our state's regulations and the jurisdictions of various state agencies can seem impossible for the average citizen. CEQ is an accessible and efficient entity to which the average citizen can bring complicated issues and get answers. Before I came to work for the Connecticut River Watershed Council, I was an environmental advocate for an all-volunteer, non-profit organization. In the beginning, I did not have the knowledge and resources to understand and address certain issues. When there was an opportunity to comment on the Environmental Impact Evaluation for additional water supplies to UCONN in 2012, I had more questions than answers. CEQ was able to provide these answers and issue independent recommendations.

In addition to its vital, irreplaceable role as an investigator of citizen complaints, the annual State of the Environment Report and bimonthly Environmental Monitor are essential publications that would cease to have value if the Council's autonomy were compromised. We understand that all budgets require difficult choices, but this is a very small portion of a nearly \$40 billion dollar budget. Considering the Council's high quality output and ability to meet its responsibilities with a staff of two and a modest budget, \$180,000 is money very well spent.

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