



Testimony to the Appropriations Committee in Opposition to Section 5 of the
Deficiency Bill/Sweep of Community Investment Act Funds

April 21, 2015

From Alexander R. Brash, President
Connecticut Audubon Society
314 Unquowa Road
Fairfield, Ct 06824
www.Ctaudubon.org

Esteemed Senators and Representatives, Members of the Committee,

Since 1898, the Connecticut Audubon Society has leveraged the charismatic nature of birds to build a conservation ethic in the state. As the original and still independent Audubon Society within the state, the organization manages four nature centers, two museums, and 19 sanctuaries. I am pleased to testify on behalf of our 10,000 members and friends who care deeply about issues like this.

We cannot over-emphasize the devastating impact that the sweep of funds from the Community Investment Act account, both in the Deficiency Bill under consideration today and in the Governor's proposed budget, will have on this state's beauty, bio-diversity, and ultimately economic vitality. The good that the Community Investment Act does is vast. It is one of Connecticut's most important sources of land conservation funds. Since 2005, it has permanently protected 7,500 acres of open space and community gardens. In the last two grant cycles alone, 57 communities have received state funds – for trail access in Stamford, drinking water protection in Meriden, endangered species protection in Glastonbury, community gardens in Bridgeport and Norwalk, and on and on.

Preserving and protecting our state's forests, meadows, brooks, and salt-marshes is critical, both because these natural resources are of great value and because morally it is the right thing to do. These "wildscapes" filter and clean our water, capture carbon, buffer our communities, and serve as home to Connecticut's many plants and animals. Open spaces, whether as wild tracts or city parks, define the quality-of-life elements that retain our citizens or attract new ones to the region. As planners have learned, working people are ever more

likely to move to a city or certain suburbs for their quality of life benefits. Witness the popularity of Seattle and San Antonio versus Detroit or St. Louis.

Funds collected through the Community Investment Act originate as real estate recording fees at the municipal level, and are dedicated to land conservation, agricultural preservation, affordable housing, historic preservation and brownfields restoration. Stripping these funds from their intended use will do far greater immediate and long-term economic damage to our state, than any good they may do to plug a budget gap.

Just as the Department of Energy and Environmental Protection is revising the Green Plan and guiding the state toward this Assembly's goal of preserving 21 percent of the land in Connecticut by 2023, the governor's proposal is to take the \$15 million that is in the Community Investment Act now (through the Deficiency Bill) and then in the proposed budget take the \$40 million that will be collected through 2017, and use it to pay the state's bills.

The Governor's pledge was to make \$7.5 million in grants per year for open space preservation, using Community Investment Act Funds. All of that would have been used to match private investments in open space preservation and will now be lost – a very short-sighted move with respect to the value of leveraging partnerships and private funds.

Thus, the real impact of the Governor's proposal would be that for a savings of \$55 million, it will also strip out another \$22.5 million in leveraged private philanthropy and sacrifice the enhancement of the very quality of life values that continue to make this state competitive and attractive to both corporations and citizens.

We believe the Governor's proposed budget and the resulting impacts are extreme enough to become "wedge issues," and we will look to use them as we move toward this fall. As they have consistently done, Connecticut's voters again spoke clearly this past November. Eighty-four percent of the candidates endorsed by the Connecticut League of Conservation Voters were elected. We plan to elevate these issues, and each elected leader's stance on them, as we move toward the next elections. We look forward to praising and supporting those who stand with us and our members against this proposed budget and the extraordinarily short-sighted impacts it will bring.