

# CONNECTICUT Land Conservation Council

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## Testimony Regarding Governor's H.B. No. 6825, Section 5 Appropriations Committee Submitted by: Amy Blaymore Paterson, Esq., Executive Director April 21, 2015

Co-Chairs Bye, Walker, and Members of the Appropriations Committee:

Thank you for this opportunity to present testimony on behalf of the Connecticut Land Conservation Council (CLCC) in strong opposition to **Section 5 of Governor's H.B. No. 6825, An Act Making Deficiency Appropriations and Addressing the Deficit for the Fiscal Year Ending June 30, 2015** (the Deficiency Bill).

CLCC works with land trusts (now numbering 137+), other conservation and advocacy organizations, government entities and landowners to increase the pace, quality, scale and permanency of land conservation in Connecticut while assuring the perpetual, high quality stewardship of conserved lands in the state.

CLCC is strongly opposed to H.B. No. 6825, Section 5, which proposes a diversion of \$15.2 from the Community Investment Act (CIA), including \$10 million from DEEP's open space grant program, \$5.2 million from historic properties preservation programs, and \$100,000 from the CT Food Policy Council, to reduce the current year's budget deficit. This proposed diversion is in addition to the complete sweep of CIA funds from January 1, 2016 through June 30, 2017 proposed in the Governor's Biennial Budget. (SB 946, Section 29b)

### **The Community Investment Act**

Enacted with tremendous bipartisan support in 2005 to address the social and environmental impacts of suburban sprawl, the CIA provides increased funding for state land use programs for **open space conservation, farmland preservation/dairy production, historic properties preservation and affordable housing development**. Funded by a \$40 surcharge on local recording fees, the impact of the CIA on the economic well-being and overall quality of life in our communities has exceeded all expectations.

Almost every town in Connecticut has benefited from the CIA – to date funding over 1,100 projects, in 168 towns for a total of \$133 million invested in our communities. The fact that those numbers continue to increase is a testament to the success and importance of the program.

### **The CIA is critical to land conservation**

The CIA is a vital source of funding for the state's Open Space and Watershed Land Acquisition Grant Program (OSWA) – the state's matching grant program for land trusts, towns and water companies seeking to conserve open space, forests and farms. The OSWA program is the backbone of the conservation community's efforts to save land and is essential to the state's



ability to meet its statutory (CGS 8-23(b)) goal to preserve 21-percent of Connecticut's land area by 2023. Like all CIA funded programs, OSWA leverages millions of matching municipal, federal and private dollars in return.

For years, the conservation community has been advocating to restore consistency to the OSWA program, which was cut back from two grant rounds to one per year, with no funding released for the program in 2009 and 2011. Now, just as the OSWA program has started to return to a predictable schedule of annual grant rounds -- enabling towns and land trusts to get back on track to strategically plan, effectively negotiate and budget annually for conservation transactions -- the program is once again in jeopardy.

The complete sweep of the CIA proposed by the Governor's biennial budget coupled with the additional diversion of \$10 million from the current CIA account for municipal open space grants under HB 6825, Section 5, will eliminate the only consistent source of funding for OSWA -- delivering an unprecedented blow to the program and creating perhaps an irreparable disruption to land conservation efforts in Connecticut.

**The Community Investment Act is a dedicated fund established outside of the budget**

The CIA was established as a dedicated revenue source outside of the budget to provide a consistent flow of funding into programs that are vital to the character and economic health of our communities; and as Connecticut residents continue to pay the \$40 surcharge for that dedicated purpose, it is their right and expectation that the fund be respected as such. Using the Deficiency Bill to raid the CIA to address the current budget deficit undermines not only the very purpose of the CIA but the public's trust and confidence in the establishment of this and any other dedicated fund.

In conclusion, the sweep of the CIA account will not only put a halt to investments slated for projects under all four CIA sectors -- land use programs with few, if any, other consistent sources of funding -- but will also set a very dangerous and perhaps irreversible precedent for using the account to address future budget deficits. Simply put, these proposed raids will put an end to the Community Investment Act as we know it.

On behalf of CLCC, together with our partners in farmland/dairy support, historic properties and affordable housing, we respectfully urge the Committee to oppose H.B. 6825, Section 5 and all other attempts to undermine the integrity and viability of the Community Investment Act. I am happy to answer any questions you may have regarding this testimony or land conservation efforts in Connecticut.