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Testimony of Eric Hammerling, Executive Director, Connecticut Forest & Park Association

Public Hearing Subject Matter	Support/ Oppose
GOVERNOR'S BILL 6825: AN ACT MAKING DEFICIENCY APPROPRIATIONS AND ADDRESSING THE DEFICIT FOR THE FISCAL YEAR ENDING JUNE 30, 2015.	Oppose Section 5 and Cuts to DEEP's Budget

The Connecticut Forest & Park Association (CFPA) is the first conservation organization established in Connecticut in 1895. For 120 years, CFPA has offered testimony before the General Assembly on sustainable forestry, state parks and forests, trail recreation, natural resource protection, and land conservation issues.

I am testifying today in **strong opposition to Section 5 of Governor's Bill 6825**, An Act Making Deficiency Appropriations and Addressing the Deficit for the Fiscal Year ending June 30, 2015.

If passed, Section 5 of Governor's Bill 6825 would divert \$15.2 million from the Community Investment Act (CIA) to reduce the current year's budget deficit. This diversion is proposed in addition to the full sweep of CIA funds from January 1, 2016 through June 30, 2017.

Over the past decade, the CIA has invested over \$133 million in 1,100 projects located in 168 municipalities. These projects support open space conservation, agricultural land protection, historic preservation, and affordable housing. Every project has a demonstrated community benefit and leverages other community investments. The CIA projects are investments in Connecticut's quality of life!

As you know, the CIA is not funded by citizens' property taxes or income taxes. The CIA funds are generated from a self-sustaining \$40 recording fee on real estate transactions. This fee was established in 2005 to dedicate funds to the purposes of the Community Investment Act regardless of short-term budget woes, and many people gladly pay this recording fee when they realize all of the important community investments it supports. Governor's Bill 6825 would not relieve citizens of paying this fee; it would only ensure the fee does not go to any of the dedicated purposes for which it was established. This "bait and switch" undermines the faith that many of us still have in our Government, and at the very least, this proposal should be opposed on the grounds of fairness and good governance.

We urge you to remove Section 5 of Governor's Bill 6825 and ensure dedicated funds will be reinvested back into our communities, sustain jobs, and improve our quality of life in Connecticut.

Although the Community Investment Act diversion is the focus of this testimony, I do want to note our frustration in seeing additional cuts being made to the Department of Energy & Environmental Protection's budget for Personal Services (\$1.198 million) and Environmental Conservation (\$505,359). DEEP is already a poorly funded Department, and every additional cut hurts morale and further undermines the effectiveness of our state's most important environmental steward.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify, and I am glad to respond to any questions you may have.