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**Testimony of David Sutherland – Director of Government Relations
Before the Appropriations Committee – March 2nd, 2015**

**In Opposition to Section 5 of H.B. No. 6825 AN ACT MAKING DEFICIENCY
APPROPRIATIONS AND ADDRESSING THE DEFICIT FOR THE FISCAL YEAR
ENDING JUNE 30, 2015.**

On behalf of The Nature Conservancy, I would like to express our strong opposition to Section 5 of Bill 6825, which would transfer \$15.2 million from the Community Investment Act (CIA) account into the General Fund.

The CIA is not funded by taxes, but by fees that property owners pay with the understanding that the revenues generated by it go towards protecting those crucial resources that are most often affected by real estate activity.

The programs funded by the CIA create on-the-ground jobs and the type of communities that attract businesses and residents. In the past ten years, the CIA has become a critical component of the state's efforts to protect the resources that are essential to the health, vitality, and economic well-being of our communities. It has funded over 626 projects in 157 towns, which have provided matching funds for all of the projects. Our latest figures indicate that communities have provided almost a one to one match on average for all the projects. The CIA also funds staff positions at the state agencies to administer these programs.

Nearly all of our Distressed and Targeted Investment municipalities have already received grants, many multiple grants, from the CIA.

Connecticut has made progress on open space conservation in the past decade, but we still rank far behind our neighboring states in the amount of state-owned parks and forests we provide for our citizens. The grants provided by the CIA enable communities to protect lands that meet stringent state criteria and in almost every case, provide public access, without burdening DEEP staff with additional management responsibilities.

We've just started to make progress in slowing the fastest loss of farmland in the nation. The continuing stall in the real estate market has given our communities important opportunities to protect prime parkland and farmland at favorable prices, but they need help to pursue these projects.

Please do not divert the dedicated funding from the Community Investment Act.