



Testimony to the Finance, Revenue and Bonding Committee, in Support of the
Community Investment Act

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Esteemed Senators and Representatives, Members of the Committee, I am Alexander R. Brash, President of the Connecticut Audubon Society. 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, 4 nature centers, 2 museums, and 19 sanctuaries across the state. 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 the Governor's proposed budget, particularly emptying the Community Investment Act account, 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 dappled forests, upland meadows, burbling brooks, and amber-hued 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, in today's connected but vagile society, 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 and 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.

But there's more. The Governor is also proposing to cut \$2 million – nearly 20 percent!! – from the \$12 million budget for state parks and nature preserves. The state's parks and preserves already suffer from substantial underfunding, and such a devastating cut would directly impact the level of services for the public that State Parks are able to provide.

Undoubtedly parks will be closed or left unmanaged, as the majority of this cut would impact the seasonal workforce, reducing it by roughly 66%. That means that there would be only 180 seasonal employees, as compared to 550, to serve as lifeguards, clean the restrooms, pick up trash, mow lawns, maintain campgrounds, and provide a basic level of security in the parks, our state's treasures.

Finally, the Governor proposes to eliminate the Council on Environmental Quality, an independent watchdog agency that, among other things, annually provides an independent and critical analysis about the state's environmental issues and land preservation efforts.

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.