

To the Finance, Revenue and Bonding Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony on SB 946.

My concern is with Section 29, which would sweep funds from the Community Investment Act (CIA) accounts. These funds have been dedicated to programs which are essential if CT is to achieve its goals for conservation of open space and farmland.

In the region where I live, large areas of land critical to our wildlife, air and water quality, and protection against climate change are threatened by development. Oswegatchie Hills in East Lyme, and the Eightmile River watershed in Salem, Lyme and East Haddam, have been singled out as sites of State and National importance. While they are now partially protected, their natural resource value could be significantly enhanced by enlarging the currently protected areas and buffering key habitats.

The CIA is a significant funding tool for achieving that protection.

All 169 municipalities drain into Long Island Sound, parts of which are already impaired. The Sound has resilience that depends upon being replenished with the clean water which drains from upland forests, meadows and farmlands throughout the State. Development inevitably impacts the Sound, and the CIA has been critical to helping prevent development in sites that are inappropriate, minimizing sprawl and allowing nature to cleanse air and water headed downstream.

Thus, while the CIA has been a mainstay not only for wildlife, open space and farmland protection - it also is critical to saving the Sound and all it means to our State's beauty and bounty (and economy!).

Some have said we should simply bond this funding. The promise of bonding funds to replace CIA funds, however, is a promise easily deferred. It also is a promise to have future generations pay for protections our generation should be responsible for, from the general fund.

Moreover, the CIA is in itself inadequate to the task funding land protection to meet State goals. The CIA funds could leverage significantly more bonding to meet State goals without affecting State bond rates, if the funds are held in the dedicated fund and used to pay off open space and farmland acquisition and protection bonds.

The Governor has clearly signaled his intention to be a good steward of the environment. But sweeping funds from the CIA is a step in the wrong direction. The environmental community is deeply concerned that one of its most successful programs is being threatened. We look to the legislature to preserve its integrity and fulfill its goals.

Thank you for your Committee's support of the CIA in the past. We count on you to live up to the legislature's commitment to this Act.

David B. Bingham, MD, Co-Chair, CT League of Conservation Voters

50 White Birch Rd., Salem, CT