

CONNECTICUT STATE GRANGE

TESTIMONY IN OPPOSITION TO SECTION 28 OF S.B. NO. 946, AN ACT CONCERNING REVENUE ITEMS TO IMPLEMENT THE GOVERNOR'S BUDGET

MARCH 9, 2015

I am Gordon Gibson of Vernon, Legislative Liaison for the Connecticut State Grange, speaking in opposition to Section 28 of Senate Bill 946, An Act Concerning Revenue Items to Implement the Governor's Budget. Section 28, if passed, would divert all funds from the Community Investment Act to the General Fund for the next two years. The Community Investment Act funds are generated by a surcharge on all deeds and other instruments recorded in the land records in all towns in Connecticut. The funds are divided between the Department of Agriculture, the Department of Energy and Environmental Protection, the Historic Commission and the Department of Housing where they are earmarked for programs as specified in the legislation.

The Grange supports all the programs for which the CIA funds are used, but especially the Department of Agriculture where the funds are used to preserve farmland and provide viability grants to farm operations and the Department of Energy and Environmental Protection where the funds are used purchase land for state parks, forests, wildlife areas and other open space programs.

Connecticut has some of the most productive farmland in the world, but we are irretrievably losing much of it to development despite the state, local and private programs to preserve it. Diverting the CIA funds will only increase the rate of farmland loss because of the lack of funds to preserve it. The State has numerous programs to help small businesses, but loss of the CIA funds will seriously reduce the number of farm businesses that can be assisted with viability grants. Much of our food now travels an average of 1500 miles from farm to table. We will never have enough land to produce all the food we consume in Connecticut, but the loss of active farms and active farmland will only increase the amount of food we must import and will increase the overall cost of food in Connecticut due to the transportation costs from farm to table.

We are continuously trying to attract new businesses into Connecticut to improve our economy. If I were to propose bringing a new industry into Connecticut that would contribute in excess of two billion dollars to our economy each year, provide approximately 2,000 permanent jobs, most of which would be for low and moderate wage earners, and cost the towns only 35 cents in services for every dollar it generated in local taxes you would welcome my industry with open arms and many incentives. But that industry is already here. It is our existing agriculture industry. How much of it will we lose if we divert the CIA funds to the general fund?

Connecticut is a densely populated state and we need to protect the open space we have left. Our state parks, forests, wildlife areas and other open space properties provide needed spaces for both recreation and conservation. Our open spaces also provide areas where the ground can absorb rainfall to recharge our lakes, ponds, wetlands and underground aquifers which provide us with the water we need for many

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purposes. As a retiree from the former Department of Environmental Protection I can personally attest to the struggle to obtain the funds needed to purchase land for the various programs of DEP and now of the Department of Energy and Environmental Protection. Transferring CIA funds from their original purposes to the general fund will only increase the need for the DEEP to use more bond funds to accomplish their goals, thus putting the State deeper in debt due to the increased bond authorizations. The Grange therefore opposes any transfer of CIA funds to the general fund.

The funds generated by the Community Investment Act have helped preserve the quality of life for both current and future generations of Connecticut residents. Do we really want to endanger the future quality of life in Connecticut by transferring the CIA funds to the general fund? The Connecticut State Grange believes we should leave the Community Investment Act funds as they are, accomplishing the purposes for which they were created. The Grange therefore urges the General Assembly to delete Section 28 of Senate Bill 946.

Thank you for your consideration of my testimony.

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