

**Testimony Regarding Elimination of the Community Investment Act.**

March 9, 2025

To the Finance, Revenue, and Bonding Committee, Senator John W. Fonfara, and Representative Jeffrey J. Berger:

I am here today with so many others to strongly oppose the sweeping of the Community Investment funds, effectively destroying the very amenities in Connecticut's environment that attract and retain permanent residents. I am a professor of Public History at CCSU where I teach Historic Preservation. Hundreds of studies and projects in multiple disciplines have proven that maintaining a sense of place, historically and environmentally, sustains communities and ensures future resources.

Over a century ago, reformers responded to the excesses and abuses of Gilded Age industrialization on its workers and environment, used conservation to guide their decisions. This development philosophy, known as conservation, aimed to benefit the most citizens possible, not a select few, and our greatest political leaders from Theodore and Franklin Roosevelt supported it. Home to Gifford Pinchot and Stephen Mather, the founding heads of the US Forest and National Park Service respectively, Connecticut's planners embraced conservation to make Connecticut a place people could not just work, but where they could live at the height of its industrial prosperity.

You can't sustain places by destroying their physical memories. We tried that already. The short-sighted urban renewal policies of the 1950s and 60s, when Robert Moses determined which amenities people desired and state and municipal governments followed his ideas of car-friendly development. Highways and strip malls sliced through the hearts of New Britain, Hartford, New Haven, Bridgeport, and Waterbury. Downtowns emptied. Local businesses closed. Whole blocks once teeming with working families have deteriorated and effectively turned into dangerous shells subject to vandalism, fire, and crime. Over the next decades, urban renewal "investment" created the unplanned, disconnected communities of sprawl, requiring inefficient use of funds to maintain uncoordinated resources. Our public spaces became Walmarts and Costcos. Activist Jane Jacobs - the woman who fought Robert Moses - observed such conformity leads "to Noplace." No one wants to live in "Noplace." "Noplace" is unsustainable.

The CIA is about getting people to live here, visit here, and stay here. Planners have reverted back to planning themes of density, diversity, and transit-oriented development: all characteristics of Connecticut's downtown historic areas. New Britain, Waterbury, New Haven, and Hartford have used CIA-funded programs to protect what is left: to reuse, recycle, and revitalize. CIA grants money up front for rehabilitation and preservation projects that, yes, at first are often more expensive than new construction and redevelopment projects. But failed development has even greater costs. Other "placemaking" policies have ignored the shelters, spaces, communities, generations, attachments, memories, traditions, and steady habits- that already exist. Storing demolition

waste only moves expenses to local governments. Put all this snow in the landfills—not the demolition waste.

The CIA includes the very amenities that retain and attract permanent residents: open space for public gathering, historic resources that define both public and private spaces, farmland for local, fresh food, and *affordable* housing. This is not gentrification. Sustainable policies are financially efficient because, by definition, they develop the most resources to benefit the *most* people.

Our environment holds our history and identity. Where we live, shapes who we are. As Boston planner Carter Wilkie and the National Trust's Richard Moe have argued, "Communities can be shaped by choice or they can be shaped by chance. We can keep accepting the kind of communities we get, or we can insist upon getting the kind of communities we want." Save the CIA.

Respectfully,



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