



STATE OF CONNECTICUT
COUNCIL ON SOIL AND WATER CONSERVATION
P.O. Box 550, Westbrook, CT
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February 9, 2016

**To: The Honorable Beth Bye, Senate Chairman of Appropriations Committee
The Honorable Toni E. Walker, House Chairman of Appropriations Committee
All Appropriations Committee Members**

**Re: REQUEST TO MAINTAIN FUNDING FOR THE CT COUNCIL ON SOIL AND WATER
CONSERVATION AND THE FIVE (5) CT CONSERVATION DISTRICTS**

Last year, under your leadership, funding for the CT Council on Soil and Water Conservation and Five (5) Conservation Districts in Connecticut was approved at \$266,250. I am writing today to respectfully request that this funding remain intact for FY2016-2017.

In September, the Governor already rescinded \$13,312 from this account. House Dems proposed a \$10,250 cut to our budget in December. Although this impacted our operating budget, we support this level of reduction as reasonable giving the budget challenges you face. We ask that you limit further reductions to our budgets. This has resulted in a total reduction of \$23,562 from our budget.

The current proposal seeks to eliminate the funding to these programs altogether.

Key facts about our programs:

1. The CT Council on Soil and Water Conservation and the Five (5) Conservation Districts are set up under state statute to provide technical assistance to municipalities, farmers and landowners. They are part of a nationwide network work on soil and water conservation
2. Districts provide critical services to municipal land use agencies including site plan review, wetland delineation, erosion and sediment control inspections and GIS mapping. Without base state funded, these services will be in jeopardy.
3. DEEP has suggested that EPA 319 grants will support District programs. This is simply not the case. 319 grants require a 60/40 match and limit funds to the particular project. They do not provide for base funding and they are not a guaranteed funding source.
4. In 2014, Districts leveraged over \$700K in additional non-state funding for soil and water conservation practices that directly improve water quality. District work in our watersheds

has led to the delisting of impaired waters.

5. In January 2015, the CT Council on Soil and Water Conservation received at \$10,000,000 grant for USDA NRCS for water quality and land protection in the Long Island Sound Watershed. This funding must be used for direct assistance to land owners and cannot be used for administration. Administration of the grant is used as part of the required match. As the administrator of this large grant, the CT Council needs to remain fully funded.

I can't emphasize enough how important State funding is to leveraging federal resources. The base funding provided to the Council and Districts provides the matching funds needed to bring federal resources into our state. In January 2015, the Council was awarded \$10 million from USDA-NRCS to coordinate and implement the Long Island Sound Watershed Regional Conservation Partnership Program. This is the largest grant ever awarded to Long Island Sound and is one of the largest awards made nationwide. It was awarded because of the leadership of the CT's Council and Districts here and at the national level, and our strong core partnership with USDA. We worked closely with our Congressional delegation and other partners from the environmental community to make this happen. The \$\$ approved to fund CTs soil and water conservation agencies this year will be used to match this and other federal grants, such as EPA 319 Clean Water Act. Since none of the USDA grant funds can be used for administration and coordination of the \$10 million grant, these matching dollars are critical to its success and future funding efforts.

As a state, we face many challenges. This includes ensuring that all of our residents have access to clean water and fresh, local foods. It also includes protecting the Long Island Sound, which is estimated to be worth over \$8 billion dollars annually to the locally economy. The roles of the CT Council on Soil and Water Conservation and the Conservation Districts are critical to protecting our soil and water resources. It is essential that they are fully funded.

Once again thank you for your leadership and past support of the Conservation Districts. Please don't hesitate to contact me if you need additional information.

Work: 860-644-2511 x229

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Respectfully yours,

Jeffrey Folger, Chair,
Connecticut Council on Soil and Water Conservation