

CONNECTICUT Land Conservation Council

Testimony Regarding Governor's FY2017 Midyear Budget Adjustments
Appropriations Committee
Conservation & Development Subcommittee
Submitted by Amy Blaymore Paterson, Esq., Executive Director
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Co-Chairs Bye, Santiago, and Members of the Conservation and Development Subcommittee of the Appropriations Committee:

Thank you for this opportunity to present testimony on behalf of the Connecticut Land Conservation Council (CLCC) concerning the Governor's FY2017 Midyear Budget Adjustments.

As the state's umbrella organization for the land conservation community, the Connecticut Land Conservation Council (CLCC) works with the state's land trusts (now numbering 137+), state conservation and advocacy organizations, government entities and landowners to increase the pace, quality, scale and permanency of land conservation in Connecticut while assuring the perpetual, high quality stewardship of conserved lands in the state.

The Governor's FY2017 Midterm Budget Adjustments ("proposed midterm budget") makes sweeping cuts across all state agencies totaling \$569.5 million; it changes how state agencies manage their budgets; and potentially eliminates thousands of state jobs. The potential impacts on the quality of our lives and the health of our state and local economies from such severe, across-the board cuts, are the cause of concern for all of us.

With respect to land conservation, we are specifically concerned that the proposed 5.75% cut to the budget for the Department of Energy & Environmental Protection (DEEP) will further devastate the department's already burdened ability to manage the state's open space and natural resources programs. These concerns are exacerbated by the fact that, without line item controls, we are unable to evaluate how these proposed cuts will impact critical land conservation programs and the staff that oversees them, leaving us with many questions – including, but not limited to, the following:

- How will the cuts affect DEEP's Open Space & Watershed Acquisition Program (matching grants program for land trusts, municipalities and water companies) – which already operates with minimal staff and has been impacted by an unprecedented level of cuts in funding from the Community Investment Act.
- Already not on track to meet the statutory goal of conserving 21% of our state land by 2023, will DEEP have sufficient resources to continue to acquire land under the Recreation and Natural Heritage Trust Program?
- What will the impact be on the Bureau of Natural Resources and the management of our state parks and forests? Will we see reductions in state park staff, already burdened by years of budget cuts and continued attrition?



- Will there be changes to the Council on Environmental Quality – the state’s independent watchdog agency that the public relies upon to monitor environmental progress, assess the efficacy of state environmental laws, policies and programs, and investigate alleged violations of environmental laws.
- With respect to the Department of Agriculture, also subject to the proposed 5.75% cut and already significantly impacted by the cuts to the Community Investment Act, how will the agency continue to meet the state’s goals for farmland preservation and support for agricultural viability?
- What will be the fate of the Connecticut Council on Soil and Water Conservation and the Conservation District which provide technical assistance at the local level to support statewide conservation priorities and are an essential partner in a federal project to improve the health of Long Island Sound?

In conclusion, the Connecticut Land Conservation Council is deeply concerned that foregoing or postponing investments into programs that support conservation, agriculture and recreation will do little to ease the state’s overall budget problems and will only serve to further undermine the long term quality of life and economic benefits that the state receives from its parks, forests, working farms and other essential open spaces.

If given the opportunity to fund line items as you have in the past, we respectfully request your consideration of these conservation priorities.

On behalf of the Connecticut Land Conservation Council, thank- you for your consideration of our comments. I would be happy to answer any questions you may have.