February 10, 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

From: Denise Savageau, member of the CT Council on Soil and Water Conservation
    and President of the CT Association of Conservation Districts

Re: REQUEST TO MAINTAIN FUNDING AS A SEPARATE LINE ITEM FOR THE CT COUNCIL ON SOIL AND WATER CONSERVATION AND THE FIVE (5) CT CONSERVATION DISTRICTS

In December, under your leadership, funding for the CT Council on Soil and Water Conservation and Five (5) Conservation Districts in Connecticut was approved at $270,000 for the FY2017. I am writing today to respectfully request that you maintain funding for the Council and Conservation Districts as a separate line item.

The Governor’s proposed budget for FY 2017 recommends that all line items in the DEEP budget be rolled into a single operational budget. **We ask that you reject the Governor’s budget proposal that rolls the line item for the Conservation Districts and the Council into this operational budget.** As you know, the Governor and DEEP have continued to recommend that funds for the District and Council be eliminated.

The Connecticut Council on Soil and Water Conservation is a state agency. The Conservation Districts are established under state statute. We are not outside agencies. We are state created entities with a long history of providing technical assistance at the local level in support of statewide conservation priorities and programs, including nonpoint source pollution prevention, erosion and sedimentation control, TMDL implementation and delisting of State Impaired Waters, water quality assessment, watershed management, wetlands protection, fish passage, habitat restoration, and farm productivity and viability. The Council and Districts work with numerous state agencies in addition to DEEP, including the Dept. of Agriculture, UConn, and the Dept. of Public Health. As such, it may be time to treat the CT Council on Soil and Water Conservation similarly to the Council on Environmental Quality, with its own section in the budget instead of as a DEEP program, which it is not.

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. We are part of a nationwide network working on soil and water conservation
that also includes the USDA Natural Resource Conservation Service.

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 funding, these services will be in jeopardy. At the League of Conservation Voters symposium in December 2015, a question was raised about the lack of support by DEEP for local inland wetland agencies. Indeed it is the local Conservation Districts that have filled this void. The Districts have trained soil scientists and certified erosion and sediment control specialists on staff in local offices across the state. Working with NRCS and CT DoAg, staff have also been trained in developing conservation and nutrient management plans for farms.

3. In 2014, Districts leveraged over $700,000 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 within our state.

4. In January 2015, the CT Council on Soil and Water Conservation received a $10,000,000 grant from USDA NRCS for water quality and land protection in the Long Island Sound Watershed. This funding must be used for direct assistance to landowners 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.

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

Sincerely,

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cc: Districts at a Glance Fact Sheet
$300,000 in state funds provided in FY14 has been instrumental in the recent award of a $10 million USDA grant to the CT Council on Soil and Water Conservation and the Conservation Districts to coordinate with other partners on the implementation of water quality and land protection projects within the entire Long Island Sound Watershed.

Conservation Districts were created by the Connecticut Legislature and are mandated to assist the Department of Energy and Environmental Protection (DEEP) in identifying and solving problems associated with soil and water conservation. Conservation Districts are established under Connecticut General Statutes Section 22a-315 and annually receive state funding.

In 2014, with $300,000 of DEEP funds under the current line item, CT Conservation Districts were able to secure an additional $700,000 in grant funds to address the following conservation priorities, as well as respond quickly to storm related issues:

- Flooding and erosion problems from storm events
- Agricultural management practices that enhance farm viability, conserve soil, and protect water quality
- Stormwater management retrofits and pretreatments and wetland mitigation
- Soil nutrient testing for the agricultural community
- Stream bank stabilization projects
- Soil erosion and sediment control inspections at problem construction sites
- Municipal Wetland Commission training and wetland delineation services
- Migratory fish passage projects
- Water quality assessment and watershed management

Established in 1946, Conservation Districts and the CT Council are part of the network of over 3,000 conservation districts and 50 state conservation agencies working hand-in-hand with USDA Natural Resource Conservation Service providing local farmers, landowners, and communities with technical assistance on soil, water and related conservation issues. Because Connecticut has no county government, they are also set up as 501-c-3 organizations with the ability to leverage federal, state, and local public dollars with private funds.

CT Conservation Districts work directly with municipalities providing a network of technical services and training on issues that affect local, regional and statewide land use decisions, including site plan reviews, storm water management, water quality assessment, natural resource inventories, and GIS mapping. They work closely with local Planning, Zoning, Conservation, and Inland Wetland Commissions, providing unbiased expertise and technical assistance on natural resource management issues to local land use commissioners and staff.

Contact Denise Savageau for more information at 203-622-6461. Thank you!
Where We Work

Eastern Connecticut Conservation District
Dan Mullins, Executive Director, 860-887-4163 x402

North Central Conservation District
Joanna Shapiro, Executive Director, 860-875-3881

Northwest Conservation District
Sean Hayden, Executive Director, 860-626-7222

Southwest Conservation District
Roman Mrozinski, Executive Director, 203-287-8038

Connecticut River Coastal Conservation District
Jane Brawerman, Executive Director, 860-346-3282

conserving natural resources for our future