

Testimony Concerning State Parks Funding (HB 5585, SB 384, SB 386)

My name is Starr Sayres, and I am a resident of East Haddam, CT. Thank you for holding this hearing to consider the urgent need to better fund our State Parks. Living in a town that hosts three State Parks, I am acutely aware of the importance of these special public lands to the well-being and fullness of life of the people of Connecticut. In our travels, we point to them with pride and witness their draw to people well beyond our borders, bringing a not insignificant tourism benefit to the State.

These parks are our heritage and our legacy – but they are also assets for which we the people are solely responsible. As citizens and elected officials, we are called upon to make hard decisions that affect life's quality. The establishment of a sustainability fund for the maintenance of the Parks (HB 5585) using unclaimed bottle deposits and funds from the Citizen's Election Program is a practical and responsible approach. Likewise, including unclaimed deposit funds from the sale of wine and liquor containers (SB 384) is a reasonable amplification of the funding.

While no one takes delight in raising admission fees, a far worse scenario is to continue down the path of understaffing our Parks, resulting in lowering of our standard of care and pride, and perhaps even the closing of some. To increase admission fees, guided by those set in surrounding states (SB 386) and thus remaining competitive, is a protective and prudent solution to current underfunding.

This is the 101st year for our State Parks. It is also the year 100 for our National Parks. What better time for us – the State of Connecticut – to stand tall and proclaim loudly that we cherish the lands which have been bequeathed to us, by establishing permanent funding for their protection.

Thank you for your consideration.