



**State of Connecticut**  
**HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES**  
STATE CAPITOL  
HARTFORD, CONNECTICUT 06106-1591

**REPRESENTATIVE MARY M. MUSHINSKY**  
EIGHTY-FIFTH ASSEMBLY DISTRICT

LEGISLATIVE OFFICE BUILDING, ROOM 4038  
HARTFORD, CT 06106-1591  
HOME: (203) 269-8378  
CAPITOL: (860) 240-8585  
TOLL FREE: 1-800-842-1902  
E-mail: Mary.Mushinsky@cga.ct.gov

**Ranking Member**  
PROGRAM REVIEW AND INVESTIGATIONS  
COMMITTEE

**MEMBER**  
ENVIRONMENT COMMITTEE  
FINANCE, REVENUE AND BONDING COMMITTEE

Testimony of Rep. Mushinsky Regarding HB 5585, AN ACT ESTABLISHING AND FUNDING A STATE PARKS SUSTAINABILITY ACCOUNT, SB 384, AN ACT CONCERNING THE APPLICATION OF THE BOTTLE BILL TO WINE AND LIQUOR BOTTLES FOR PURPOSES OF FUNDING STATE PARKS, and SB 386, AN ACT CONCERNING THE FISCAL SUSTAINABILITY OF STATE PARKS

Before the Environment Committee

March 11, 2016

These three bills seek to create a sustainable funding source for the state park system, which is beloved by the public and recently celebrated its 100<sup>th</sup> birthday. I generally support the bills but seek amendments.

The legislature's Program Review and Investigations Committee (PRI), on which I served as co-chair, examined the state park system in Dec. 2013 and confirmed deterioration of the parks and park revenues. The PRI committee's report found that:

- 1. Connecticut's state park fees are at or above other states in the region.** There has been a decrease in paid attendance following fee increases in FY 10.
- 2. Staffing levels are down and have reached a critical point regarding operations.** Connecticut's use of seasonal workers exceeds the national average.
- 3. The revenue generated through parking, admission, and camping fees – which is the vast majority of revenue – goes to the state's General Fund.** This change occurred in FY 2010.
- 4. Almost all other states have funding mechanisms allowing them to retain either all or a portion of the revenue they generate** within their systems of state parks.

**5. BESB has exclusive rights to concessions at the state parks, limiting other concession possibilities.**

PRI recommended the following strategies:

- 1. A portion of the proceeds, as determined by the Department of Energy and Environmental Protection on an annual basis, from renting cabins located within state parks or forests should be deposited within a Maintenance, Repair, and Improvement account for the specific park where such cabin(s) is located.**
- 2. DEEP field personnel should be allowed to retain some portion, as determined by the department, of any realized savings within the same park unit and/or district. Field personnel should be given this incentive to improve their own parks.**
- 3. Between one quarter and one half of revenue generated in state parks should be appropriated biennially to the Parks Division, while linked to accountability measures.**
- 4. The Parks Division should create a plan for use of park-generated revenue that balances the distribution of park revenue-based funds among the park or park units that generated the revenue and the needs of the entire system of parks.**

Based on this report, I support raising dedicated funds such as recommended in SB 384, 386 and HB 5585, and the state should increase the use of the popular cabins and other revenue raising concessions. However, the revenues need to be dedicated to the park system; the decision of FY 2010 must be reversed.

HB 5585 should be amended to delete the 40% reduction of the Citizens Election Fund, which allows for clean elections.

SB 384 should be amended to increase the handling fee for all soda, beer and water containers to 3.5 cents as is the case in New York, Massachusetts and Vermont or 4 cents as in Maine. Redemption centers in Connecticut, including the center in my town of Wallingford, are struggling to survive on a 1.5 (soda, water) or 2 cent (beer) handling fee that is 35 years old. These centers provide an important community service by providing extra income for needy residents and student groups, and they greatly increase the recycling rate of containers. Redemption centers deserve a raise!

SB 386 includes a per person admission fee which may be problematic based on PRI's findings. But it would be appropriate to end permanent free passes, which will only increase the parks' deterioration as the state's baby boom population takes advantage of free entry.

Thank you for your efforts to reverse the decline of the state park system.