February 27, 2019

Submitted by: Bryan Hurlburt, Connecticut Farm Bureau Association Executive Director

To the members of Appropriations Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony regarding HB 7148 AN ACT CONCERNING THE STATE BUDGET FOR THE BIENNium ENDING JUNE THIRTIETH, 2021, AND MAKING APPROPRIATIONS THEREFOR.

The CT Farm Bureau Association is a private, non-profit, membership organization representing nearly 3,000 CT families dedicated to elevating the status of agriculture in our state through education, market promotion, and legislative advocacy. In our state, agriculture is made up of over 6,000+ small businesses, contributes $4 billion to CT’s economy, employs 21,000 people, and works 436,000 acres of land.

The proposed budget touches a number of our public policy priorities and makes strong investments in supporting the industry. We are pleased to see that the Governor has funded and made additional investments in the Department of Agriculture. A stand-alone, cabinet-level Department of Agriculture remains CFBA top priority. It is a critical component to support the continuation of a strong industry, providing regulatory oversight, and guidance to producers. The increase in funded positions reinforces the commitment to the department, as the department has felt the negative impacts of attrition over the past few years.

A top priority of CFBA for this session is to legalize, and create a USDA-approved, state program for industrial hemp. The Governor has made a strong investment in this program with the funding for additional personnel to develop and regulate a hemp program at both the Department of Agriculture and the CT Agricultural Experiment Station. CFBA sees industrial hemp as a cash crop that many farmers will pursue to increase on-farm revenues. Hemp revenues could generate $37,500 per acre (750 lbs/acre at $50/lb), which would provide a much-needed boost to the agricultural economy. In addition to generating new revenues for an individual farm, creating this new market opportunity could increase total acreage of land that is in production, generate additional investments in equipment and labor, increase the agricultural services needed to maintain that land, and develop a hemp processing infrastructure.

The Voice of Connecticut Agriculture
CFBA offers the following comments on other areas of the proposed budget:

- **Dairy Farmer – Agriculture Sustainability Account** - The increased investment comes at a time with the dairy economy is in dire straits. CFBA has worked with the legislature and previous administration to increase the funds available for the Agriculture Sustainability account and this investment is much needed by CT dairy farmers.

- **Senior Food Vouchers** – The additional investment in the SFMNP would increase the spending power of this population of seniors at farmers markets and attract new customers to the market. The Aging Committee has passed a bill that would increase the amount of the vouchers to $50 per booklet. CFBA suggests that if the booklet amounts are increased, that the total funds are increased accordingly, so that seniors have more vouchers to redeem at markets and not fewer seniors have more vouchers to redeem.

- **WIC Coupon Program for Fresh Produce** – Support

- **Regional Market Operation Fund** – Support

- **CIA Funding to General Fund** – CFBA supports that the funds for the numerous programs that the CIA program supports have been listed, with amounts, in the budget document. We urge that these funding levels continue as statutorily required. We are concerned that moving the CIA to the General Fund makes it easier to sweep in the future, and request that it remains stand-alone fund.

- **CAES Increase in Funding and Personnel** – Support

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on this proposal and I would be happy to answer any questions you may have.