

Environment Committee JOINT FAVORABLE REPORT

Bill No.: HB-7157

AN ACT CONCERNING FUNDING FOR BIKEWAY PATHS, RECREATIONAL

Title: TRAILS AND GREENWAYS.

Vote Date: 3/8/2019

Vote Action: Joint Favorable Substitute

PH Date: 3/1/2019

File No.: 193

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SPONSORS OF BILL:

Environment Committee

Rep. Patricia A. Dillon, 92nd Dist.

Rep. Kenneth M. Gucker, 138th Dist.

Rep. Mary M. Mushinsky 85th Dist.

REASONS FOR BILL:

Section 23-103 of the Connecticut General Statutes allows the State Bond Commission the ability to issue bonds of the state of up to ten million dollars for Department of Energy and Environmental Protection (DEEP) to establish a Connecticut bikeway, pedestrian walkway, recreational trail and greenway grant program. The department committed the last of the ten million dollar authorized bonding in the summer of 2018. Since 2016 the Connecticut Recreational Trails & Greenways Program has provided ten million dollars to sixty municipal and nonprofit grants, state park projects, and state forest projects. However, DEEP has received more than twelve million dollars in funding requests through the program. The bill seeks to provide funding for the remaining requests by increasing the bonding cap to fourteen million dollars.

Substitute Language – LCO No. 5657

The bill as originally drafted would increase the bonding cap for the Connecticut Recreational Trails & Greenways Program to twelve million dollars. Testimonies shared with the committee recommended the bill be amended to provide authorization for three million dollars in fiscal year 2020 and another three million dollars for fiscal year 2021, for a cap of sixteen million dollars. Substitute language for the bill increased the bonding cap to fourteen million dollars.

RESPONSE FROM ADMINISTRATION/AGENCY:

None Submitted.

NATURE AND SOURCES OF SUPPORT:

Amy Blaymore Paterson, Executive Director, Connecticut Land Conservation Council (CLCC): Without this bill, there will be no more matching grants available to fund projects. The grant program has allowed for the investment of ten million dollars to sixty municipal and nonprofit grants, as well as, multiple state park and forest projects. Additionally, as a matching grant program, it also leverages investments from public and private sources. This bill is necessary because of the large remaining backlog of requests. CLCC recommends amending the language to allow for a three million dollar bonding level for fiscal year 2020 and 2021.

Clare Cain, Trails Stewardship Director, Connecticut Forest Park Association (CFPA): Connecticut has over 1,200 miles of recreational trails. CFPA shared personal testimony of how the CFPA's 2017 Summer Trail Crew program would not be possible without the Connecticut Recreational Trails Program. CFP recommends the bond authorization increased to three million dollars in both fiscal year 2020 and 2021.

Alicea Charamut, River Steward, Connecticut River Conservancy (CRC): Water trails are trails as well. CRC is an active partner in the development of the Connecticut River Paddlers' Trail. The Connecticut River Paddlers' Trail is a trail of primitive campsites and river access points spanning from the river's headwaters in New Hampshire to Long Island Sound. CRC shared personal testimony of their project to make the "Source to Sea" trail more accessible.

Heather Clish, Director of Conservation & Recreation Policy, Appalachian Mountain Club: Trail systems benefit the economic development of the communities that host them. The Appalachian Mountain Club recommends amending the original draft of the bill to an additional three million dollars over the next two fiscal years.

Patrick M. Comins, Executive Director, The Connecticut Audubon Society: The Connecticut trail systems are essential in connecting state residents to the environment. Funds spent to maintain state trails are recouped by the spending of people participating in outdoor recreational activities. Additionally, the Connecticut Audubon Society recommends raising bond levels to three million dollars in both of the next two fiscal years.

Jeanne Davies, Executive Director, and Riley Doherty, Environmental Programs Assistant, Connecticut Resource Conservation & Development (CT RC&D): Shared personal testimony of the Connecticut Recreational Trail Grant program's impact on CT RC&D's implementation of their Twelve Town Air Line State Park Trail Master Plan. Trails promote healthy lifestyles in the state, and bring in \$6.9 billion in consumer spending, \$2.2 billion in wages and salaries, \$502 million in state and local tax revenues, and supports 71,000 Connecticut jobs. CT RC&D recommends the bill be amended to authorize the bonding of three million dollars in both the 2020 and 2021 fiscal years.

R. Bruce Donald, Tri-State Coordinator, East Coast Greenway Alliance: Although supportive of the bill, the language should be amended to authorize three million dollars in both fiscal year 2020 and 2021. Although DEEP has invested ten million dollars since 2016, there are more requests currently backlogged. Bonding must be continued because DEEP has opted out of the federal recreation trails program and there will be no matching grants available. The bonding allocated through this bill will be the only source of funding available in 2020 and 2021.

Samuel Gold, Executive Director, Lower Connecticut River Valley Council of Government (RiverCOG): Trails provide a connection between the community and nature. One of the more exciting trail project in development is the extension of the Air Line Trail to existing trails. Once complete, the connection of the Air Line Trail to other trails, collectively called the Central Connecticut Loop Trail, will create a 111 mile loop in central Connecticut

Aaron Goode, Farmington Canal Rail-to-Trail Association: After many years working to complete the Farmington Canal Heritage Trail, there are only two gaps in this trail that connects New haven to the Massachusetts border. Connecticut has one of the strongest trails network in the nation and should expand on this achievement by linking trails to other regional and multi-state trail networks. Additionally the Farmington Canal Rail-to-Trail Association recommends the bill be amended to authorize three million dollars for both fiscal years 2020 and fiscal year 2021.

Eric Hammerling, Executive Director, Connecticut Forest & Parks Association (CFPA): Since 2016, the Connecticut Recreational Trails & Greenways Program has put \$10 million into sixty municipal and nonprofit grants, as well as, multiple State Parks and Forest projects. In the summer of 2018, the Department of Energy and Environmental Protection had committed the last \$3.17 million in bonding authorized by current legislation. However, the agency had more than \$12 million in funding requests. It is important to note that this bonding program is different from the funds spent by the Connecticut Department of Transportation for the East Coast Greenway through the state, a paved multi-use trail system. Funds authorized through the bill can be spent on things that federal dollars cannot. Additionally, CFPA recommends that the bill authorizes the bonding of three million dollars in both fiscal year 2020 and 2021.

Mason Trumble, Connecticut Market Coordinator, REI Co-op (REI): Many outdoor businesses are headquartered in Connecticut, such as Cannondale, Denali Outdoors, Thule, Eastern Mountain Sports, Lowa, and Outside TV. In Connecticut, the outdoor recreation economy generated \$9 billion in consumer spending. The Bureau of Economic Analysis had reported that in 2016, the outdoor recreation economy grew faster than the overall US economy. REI has found that the strongest outdoor recreation economies exist in places that offer exceptional outdoor recreation, in Connecticut such places are primarily trails. REI recommends the bill be amended to the increase in bonding levels of three million dollars for both fiscal years 2020 and 2021.

The Environment Committee received approximately 70 similar testimonies supporting the bill explaining that (1) the authorized ten million dollars currently authorized for bonding has been fully allocated since the summer of 2018, (2) there are more than twelve million dollars in funding requests submitted to DEEP, (3) the outdoor recreation economy has a great impact

to Connecticut's economy overall, and (4) the bill should be amended to authorize additional bonding for three million dollars for fiscal years 2020 and 2021. Many testimonies also shared personal positive impacts, uses, and accomplishments through the use of grants from the Connecticut Recreational Trails & Greenways Program.

NATURE AND SOURCES OF OPPOSITION:

None Submitted.

Reported by: Pamela Bianca / Ussawin R. Bumpen Date: 3/27/2019