

# CONNECTICUT Land Conservation Council

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## Testimony in Opposition to Governor's Bill No. 6842 (Sections 1 and 2) Government Administration and Elections Submitted by: Amy Blaymore Paterson, Esq., Executive Director March 2, 2015

Senator Cassano, Representative Jutila, and members of the Committee:

Please accept this testimony on behalf of the Connecticut Land Conservation Council in opposition to Sections 1 and 2 of **Governor's Bill No. 6842: An Act Implementing the Recommendations of the Governor Concerning General Government** related to the Council on Environmental Quality (CEQ).

The Connecticut Land Conservation Council (CLCC) works with the state's land trusts (now numbering 137+), other conservation and advocacy organizations, government entities and landowners to increase the pace, quality, scale and permanency of land conservation in Connecticut while assuring the perpetual, high quality stewardship of conserved lands in the state.

CLCC opposes Sections 1 and 2 of Governor's Bill No. 6842 which proposes to transfer CEQ to the Joint Committee on Legislative Management (Office of Legislative Management), eliminate the agency's funding, and strip the council of its authority to hire staff.

Created in 1971, CEQ is the state's independent watch-dog agency that the public relies upon to, *inter alia*, monitor environmental progress, assess the efficacy of state environmental laws, policies and programs, and investigate alleged violations of environmental laws. Acting through its volunteer council and just two staff, with limited support from DEEP for administrative purposes only, CEQ provides the public with these services efficiently, effectively and at minimal cost (less than \$185,000/year) to the state. There is likely no other state agency that does so much for so little.

While the bill would preserve the basic structure of the council (nine members, with the Chairperson appointed by the Governor), it would shift personnel decisions from the council to the Office of Legislative Management, thereby eliminating a critical layer of autonomy that is essential to the council's ability to provide independent input to both the executive and legislative branches of government.

Without a comprehensive fiscal analysis, it is difficult to understand how any change in CEQ's current structure would result in any meaningful benefit to the state's budget or general operation. Indeed, it would not be surprising if this move would only serve to create unintended conflicts and administrative inefficiencies – with the public and the quality of our environment paying the price.

For these reasons, CLCC requests that the Committee vote against Sections 1 and 2 and support efforts to restore CEQ's funding under its current structure in order to best effectuate the agency's unique position of independence and assure its continued ability to carry out its mission on behalf of the public interest. Thank you for this opportunity to submit our comments on this important issue.

