

CONNECTICUT Land Conservation Council

Testimony on SB 1061, HB 7345, HB 6429 and SB 1062
Environment Committee
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Co-Chairs Cohen and Demicco, Vice-Chairs Gresko and Kushner, Ranking Members Harding and Miner, and Members of the Environment Committee:

Thank you for this opportunity to present testimony regarding the following bills: **SB 1061: AAC the Restoration of Funds to the Community Investment Act (Support); HB 7345: AAC the Community Investment Act Account and Combatting Invasive Plant and Animal Species (Oppose); HB 6429: AAC A Grant-in-Aid Program for Municipalities Combatting Gypsy Moth and Emerald Ash Borer Infestations (Support); and SB 1062: AA Authorizing Municipal Climate Change and Coastal Resiliency Reserve Funds (Support).**

As the state's umbrella organization for the land conservation community, including its 137+/- land trusts, the Connecticut Land Conservation Council (CLCC) advocates for land conservation, stewardship and funding, and works to ensure the long-term strength and viability of the land conservation community in Connecticut.

CLCC supports SB 1061. Enacted with tremendous bipartisan support in 2005, the Community Investment Act (CIA) was established as a dedicated account outside of the budget to provide consistent funding for open space, farmland/dairy support, historic properties, and affordable housing programs. Funded through a \$40 surcharge on local recording fees, the CIA has invested over \$153 million in 1,400+ projects across all four sectors -- benefiting every town in Connecticut. The CIA is an economic driver, leveraging millions in matching funds, creating jobs, and contributing to the viability of private sector industries which boost local and state economies.

Due to years of cuts and diversions from the CIA, agencies have been forced to work with reduced fund balances that have restricted the timing and volume of project activity across all four CIA sectors -- thereby undermining the efficiency and efficacy of the program. CLCC strongly supports SB 1061 which would restore a portion of the \$5 million that was diverted from the CIA account as part of recent deficit mitigation adjustments.

CLCC opposes HB 7345. We agree that invasive species pose a serious and growing threat to lakes, as well as other aquatic and terrestrial environments throughout the state -- hence our support of HB 6429 and other bills raised by this committee as referenced below. However, we contend that using CIA funds to address this problem is not the appropriate solution.

For DEEP - the agency specifically impacted by HB 7345 -- the CIA is the only consistent source of funding for the Open Space and Watershed Land Acquisition Program (OSWA), the state's matching



grant program for land trusts, municipalities and water companies seeking to conserve open space. DEEP also relies upon the CIA to fund several staff positions as well as the Urban Green and Community Garden Grant Program for targeted and distressed municipalities. HB 7345 would divert funds from these already underfunded programs at a time when the state is struggling to meet its land conservation goals.

As we have discussed with members of the Environment Committee, we contend that there are better ways to address the proliferation of invasive species in the state, including two bills which are currently under consideration by this committee. Specifically, CLCC supports **HB 6637** which would require boaters to purchase an invasive stamp to establish a funding source to assist municipalities in developing invasive species control programs.

We also advocate strongly for the approval of **HB 5254**, which authorizes a pilot group of municipalities to raise funds for open space protection and other environmental projects -- including removal of invasives. Indeed, many municipalities have expressed an interest in participating in the pilot program specifically because it would give them an opportunity to establish a local funding source to address invasives.

We urge members of this Committee to approve HB 6637 and HB 5254 to create funding opportunities to combat the very serious problem of invasive species control and management that impacts land, water and other natural resources throughout the state.

While CLCC also supports **HB 6429**, which establishes a grant-in-aid program to help municipalities with the costs associated with tree damage from gypsy moth and emerald ash borer infestations, we contend that these expenses could also be covered by a local program adopted pursuant to HB 5254.

CLCC supports SB 1062. Land conservation plays a critical role in responding to and mitigating the impacts of climate change. Among other benefits, land captures carbon and other greenhouse gases, and acts as a natural buffer along coasts, riverbeds, and other flood-prone areas. CLCC supports SB 1062 which enables municipalities to establish climate change and coastal resiliency reserve funds and investment strategies that can be used to support projects, including for land acquisition, which mitigate impacts of climate change.

On behalf of the Connecticut Land Conservation Council, I thank you for this opportunity to provide our comments and would be happy to answer any questions you may have.