

CONNECTICUT
Land Conservation Council

Testimony on Senate Bill Nos. 429, 338, 449, and 424
Environment Committee
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Senator Kennedy, Senator Miner, Representative Demicco, Ranking Member Harding, and Members of the Environment Committee:

Thank you for this opportunity to present testimony regarding the following Committee bills: **Senate Bill No. 429: An Act Concerning the Passport to the Parks (SB 429) (Support)**; **Senate Bill No. 338: An Act Concerning the Use of CIA Account Funds for Combatting Invasive Species (SB 338) (Oppose)**; **Senate Bill No. 449: An Act Concerning The Disposition Of The Former Seaside Sanatorium Facility (SB 449) (Oppose)**; and **Senate Bill No. 424: An Act Authorizing Bonding for Bikeways, Greenways and Recreational Trails (SB 424) (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 429. A new program created by the state biennial budget adopted last year, Passport to the Parks is intended to generate dedicated revenues to support the operation and maintenance of our State Parks. Consistent with this legislative intent, SB 429 would set up the Passport to the Parks as a non-lapsing account rather than an appropriated fund, ensuring a consistent source of funding for the program outside the timing of the general budget process. This feature is particularly important for the Department of Energy and Environmental Protection (DEEP) since the bulk of the budgeting and other planning for the operation and utilization of the State Parks, including hiring of seasonal staff and accepting reservations of campgrounds, need to be made in winter months. A non-lapsing, dedicated account will also leave it less vulnerable to dilution and sweeps in the future.

CLCC opposes SB 338. The Community Investment Act (CIA) was enacted to fund four specific land use programs which support the economy and create jobs. Enacted with tremendous bipartisan support in 2005, the CIA provides increased funding for state programs for open space, farmland/dairy production, historic properties and affordable housing. Funded by a surcharge on recording fees, the CIA has benefited the economic well-being and overall quality of life in virtually every town in Connecticut.

While we strongly agree that invasive species pose a serious and growing threat to lakes, as well as other aquatic and terrestrial environments throughout the state, we contend that using CIA funds to address this problem is not the solution and will only serve to undermine the efficacy of the program. Specifically, the four CIA sectors are already operating with less funding due to years of continuous sweeps of the account; the proposal would divert funds from DEEP's already underfunded Open Space & Watershed Land Acquisition Grant Program; and DEEP is already stretched thin with scarce, if any, resources to administer another grant program.

As we have discussed with members of the Environment Committee and the Planning and Development Committee, we contend that a better solution to addressing the very serious problem of invasive species control



and management is to provide municipalities with the option to establish their own source of dedicated funding that purpose.

The Planning and Development Committee is currently considering Senate Bill 181: An Act Establishing a Pilot Program for Preservation of Open Space. This bill would enable, but not require, four municipalities, with the option to establish through their own local public input/decision-making process a fund to acquire, preserve, and maintain municipal open space, water resources, and farmland through a limited buyers' conveyance fee program. Six additional towns have asked to be included in the pilot program; many more are interested due especially to their need for local funding to address invasives.

We urge members of this Committee to encourage their colleagues on the Planning and Development Committee to approve SB 181 and give these towns the option to adopt a program that will help to combat the very serious problem of invasive species control and management that impacts our state's land, water and other natural resources.

CLCC opposes SB 449. Located on Long Island Sound in Waterford, this 34-acre site was designated by the Governor as a state park in 2014. Since that time, DEEP has gone through an extensive planning process for the property as part of the Connecticut State Park system, including soliciting public input and developing a Master Plan for Seaside State Park. Released in January 2018 as part of the Record of Decision, the Master Plan includes detailed findings related to the ecological, cultural, and archaeological resources on the site and sets forth several alternatives for use of the property. Consequently, it is neither necessary nor fiscally responsible to require DEEP to again pursue information to determine the best use of Seaside State Park. Please oppose SB 449 and allow DEEP to move forward with the implementation of the Master Plan.

CLCC supports SB 424. This bill re-authorizes bonding for the CT Recreational Trails & Greenways program, for which there is currently a backlog of grant requests of over \$10 million. This grant program truly has made a difference, investing \$7 million since 2016 into 41 municipal and nonprofit grants as well as multiple State Park and Forest projects in more than half of all communities across the state. As a matching grant program, it also leverages investments into important community projects from public and private sources. Without this bonding re-authorization, there will be no more matching grants available to fund projects including construction of new trails, maintenance and restoration of existing trails, purchase or lease of equipment, acquisition of trail easements, and developing trail access for people with disabilities.

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.