

CONNECTICUT Land Conservation Council

Testimony
Governor's H.B. No. 7051
Government Administration and Elections Committee
Submitted by Amy Blaymore Paterson, Executive Director
February 27, 2017

Chairman Fox, Co-Chairs McLachlan and Winfield, Vice-Chairs Frantz, Slossberg, and Winkler, and Members of the Government Administration and Elections Committee:

Thank you for this opportunity to present testimony on behalf of the Connecticut Land Conservation Council (CLCC) regarding **Sections 9-18 and 31 of Governor's House Bill No. 7051, AN ACT IMPLEMENTING THE GOVERNOR'S BUDGET RECOMMENDATIONS FOR GENERAL GOVERNMENT (HB 7051)**. CLCC is strongly opposed to these sections which eliminate the Council on Environmental Quality (CEQ) and its duties and authorities.

As the State's umbrella organization for the land conservation community, including its 137 land trusts, 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.

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. CEQ services also include The Environmental Monitor (project information for the public under CEPA and for notices of proposed transfers of land), Annual Reports on Environmental Quality, Special Reports (most recently, "Energy Sprawl in Connecticut" ...), monthly meetings, and an opportunity for citizens to lodge complaints and otherwise voice concerns to an independent and objective council.

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 (\$174,000) to the state. There is likely no other state agency that does so much for so little.

The Governor's Budget proposes zero funding for the CEQ, and HB 7051, through Section 31, repeals the enabling statute (CGS section 22a-11) for the agency, and through Sections 9 – 18, eliminates CEQ's duties and authorities pursuant to statute. One CEQ duty, the publication of the Environmental Monitor, is transferred to DEEP (which is stretched beyond capacity to effectively execute its current responsibilities and programs); all others are eliminated.

We contend that the elimination of this critical agency would not result in any meaningful benefit to the state's budget or general operations -- with the public and the health of our environment paying the price. We respectfully request that funding be returned to the budget to support CEQ and its status be restored in the General Statutes so that it may continue to carry out its mission on behalf of the public interest.

On behalf of the Connecticut Land Conservation Council, I thank you for this opportunity to provide our comments in opposition to the elimination of this critically important agency. We would be happy to answer any questions you may have.

