

CONNECTICUT  
Land Conservation Council

Testimony on Governor's House Bill No. 6439  
Appropriations Committee  
Submitted by Amy Blaymore Paterson, Executive Director  
Connecticut Land Conservation Council  
February 19, 2021

Co-Chairs Osten and Walker, Vice-Chairs Hartley, Dathan, and Nolan, Ranking Members Miner and France, and members of the Appropriations Committee:

The Connecticut Land Conservation Council (CLCC) is the state's umbrella organization for the land conservation community, including its ~130 land trusts. We advocate for land conservation, stewardship and funding, and work to ensure the long-term strength and viability of the land conservation community in Connecticut.

Thank you for this opportunity to present testimony on behalf of CLCC in support of **H.B. No. 6439, An Act Concerning the State Budget for the Biennium Ending June Thirtieth 2023, and Making Appropriations Therefor** (referred to herein as Governor's Budget or Proposed Budget) as it relates to several of CLCC's 2021 conservation priorities.

**Community Investment Act (CIA):** At the outset, we wish to express our gratitude to the Governor for protection and continued full funding of the Community Investment Act (CIA) program, providing a consistent source of dedicated funding outside of the budget for investments in open space, farmland/dairy support, historic properties, and affordable housing programs in communities across the state.

**Passport to Parks Program:** CLCC is pleased to see the Passport to Parks program revenues being used as intended in the Governor's Budget. We note, however, that expenditures for the Passport program exceed revenue (A-23). Without further detail, it is hard to know what is behind this change from previous years and how it will impact the availability of the funds to invest in our state parks. This is a trend that is not sustainable and warrants further analysis.

**Revenue for DEEP:** We are concerned with the decrease in the budget for the Environmental Conservation branch of DEEP for both FY 2022 and 2023, as well as the loss of twelve full-time positions funded by the General Fund. Budget cuts in previous years have significantly reduced staffing for DEEP's environmental and conservation programs. Working closely with our colleagues in the agency's Land Acquisition and Management division, we appreciate the challenges they face in implementing core programs that are essential to state and local land conservation efforts. With demand for programs like the Open Space and Watershed Land Acquisition Grant Program at an all-time high, coupled with anticipated increases in federal revenue that is a source of match dollars for these programs -- such as the Land and Water Conservation Fund, Highlands



Conservation Act, and Agricultural Land Easement programs, among others -- it is essential that DEEP has the capacity to fully realize the benefits of these funds.

Throughout the challenges of this past year, the people across the state have turned to public and private open spaces, forests, and parks as a source of solace and relief. Never has the public's need for access to the outdoors been more important and impactful. This demand for open spaces, along with the essential role that land, water, and other natural resources play in addressing the impacts of climate change, underscores the critical need to generously invest in the staff, programs, and services that protect our environment, public health, and economic well-being.

Thank you for this opportunity to provide our comments, and for all you do. I would be happy to answer any question you may have.