

CONNECTICUT
Land Conservation Council

Testimony on Governor's House Bill No. 5035
Appropriations Committee
Submitted by Amy Blaymore Paterson, Executive Director
Connecticut Land Conservation Council
February 20, 2018

Co-Chairs Formica, Osten and Walker, Ranking Member Ziobron, and members of the Appropriations Committee:

Thank you for this opportunity to present testimony on behalf of the Connecticut Land Conservation Council concerning Governor's Bill H.B. 5035, **An Act Adjusting the State Budget for the Biennium Ending June Thirtieth 2019**.

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 submits this testimony in connection with the "Passport to the Parks" -- a new program created by the state biennial budget adopted last year that is intended to generate dedicated revenues to support the operation and maintenance of our State Parks. Supported through a \$10 fee that is being applied through the Connecticut Department of Motor Vehicles to registration of non-commercial vehicles, the Passport to the Parks provides Connecticut residents access to all state parks for free, while helping to restore and support park services such as campgrounds, lifeguards and hours of operation at certain parks and nature centers.

With regard to the Passport, CLCC respectfully requests the following:

Ensure Passport to the Parks Stays a Dedicated, Non-Lapsing Account

Consistent with the legislature's intent in creating the Passport to the Parks, we ask the Committee to amend the language in the Governor's Budget Adjustment Plan (See Governor's Bill S.B. 6, **An Act Implementing the Governor's Budget Recommendations for General Government**, Sections 14-22) to ensure the program stays a dedicated, non-lapsing account. One of the most important elements of the Passport to the Parks is that it is intended to be a non-lapsing account, providing a consistent source of funding outside the timing of the general budget process. This feature is particularly important for the Department of Energy and Environmental Protection 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. However, despite both the intent and need for the fund to be non-lapsing, the Governor's Budget Adjustment Plan (p. 29) proposes to move the Passport to the Parks "expenditures back on-budget through a separate appropriated fund". CLCC is concerned that this change from a non-lapsing, dedicated account to an appropriated fund will undermine the efficacy of the program and leave it vulnerable to dilution and sweeps in the future.

Remove current diversions to the General Fund from the Passport to the Parks (H.B. 5035, Sections 9 & 28)

The Passports to the Parks includes built-in diversion of \$5 million "surplus" funds to the General Fund in FY 2019 in anticipation of revenue of \$16 million projected in the budget. Until revenues are actually collected, it is premature to set an amount for the diversion. If revenues fall short, this sizable diversion would hurt the Parks and Campgrounds that the Passport was established to protect.

On behalf of the Connecticut Land Conservation Council, I thank you for this opportunity to provide our comments.

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