

CONNECTICUT Land Conservation Council

Testimony on Senate Bill No. 924
Environment Committee
Submitted by Amy Blaymore Paterson, Esq., Executive Director
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Co-Chairs Cohen and Gresko, Vice-Chairs Slap and Palm, Ranking Members Miner and Harding, and members of the Environment Committee:

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

Thank you for this opportunity to present testimony on behalf of CLCC in support of **Senate Bill No. 924, An Act Concerning The Staffing And Resources Of The Department Of Energy And Environmental Protection (SB 924)**. CLCC is supportive of this bill with a qualification that the costs of preparing the report not be placed upon the agency.

As we testified at the Appropriations Committee hearing on February 19, CLCC is concerned with the proposed decrease in the budget for the Environmental Conservation (EC) branch of DEEP for both FY 2022 and 2023 (Proposed Budget), 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, as well as enforcement and compliance, while their responsibilities continue to grow. Now they face unprecedented retirements by summer 2022—up to 40% of their staff could be eligible and ~26% plan to leave.¹ These retirements will impact DEEP's ability to protect our public health and natural resources. Understanding and planning for the impacts of this exodus needs to start in earnest now.

In the context of CLCC's land conservation work, we partner closely with our colleagues in the agency's Land Acquisition and Management office and 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, it is essential that DEEP has the capacity to fully realize the benefits of these funds.

As part of CLCC's testimony last month, we asked the Appropriations Committee to obtain further insight into how proposed decreases in the EC budget, as well as the loss of staff, will impact the agency's ability to implement core programs and uphold its enforcement and other essential responsibilities. If approved, SB 924 would help to shed insight into these and other concerns

¹ See, ["Protecting Connecticut's Future: Overcoming the 2022 Environmental Cliff"](#), Save the Sound (March 2021)



regarding the adequacy of the state's investments in DEEP by requiring the agency to prepare: (1) An accounting of agency staffing positions paid for from the revenues of the Passport to the Parks account; and (2) An assessment of the effect of impending agency staff retirements on the viability and efficacy of current and planned agency programs and responsibilities.

CLCC supports the preparation of a comprehensive report to ensure that DEEP has the resources to support the staff, programs, and services that protect our environment, public health, and economic well-being. However, in light of the severe budget constraints under which the agency has been operating for years, we feel that it is neither fair nor feasible to ask DEEP's staff to undertake this study without an appropriation of additional funding dedicated for that purpose.

With that caveat, we ask that the Committee approve SB 924. Thank you for this opportunity to provide our comments. I'm happy to answer any questions you may have.