

# CONNECTICUT Land Conservation Council

Testimony on House Bill No. 7157  
Environment Committee  
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Co-Chairs Cohen and Demicco, Vice-Chairs Gresko and Kushner, Ranking Members Harding and Miner, and members of the Environment Committee:

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.

Thank you for this opportunity to present testimony on behalf of CLCC in strong support of **House Bill No. 7157, An Act Concerning Funding for Bikeway Paths, Recreational Trails and Greenways**. HB 7157 re-authorizes bonding for the CT Recreational Trails & Greenways program, without which 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.

This grant program truly has made a difference, investing \$10 million since 2016 into 60 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.

Why do we need this grant program? Just ask your local land trust and their community partners! When a land trust or municipality acquires land for conservation, it is not the end of the process; it is just the beginning. Land conservation is as much about the stewardship and management of the property as it is about acquiring and protecting it to begin with.

What does this mean? A lot of dirty work: implementing management plans to ensure a balance between protection of the land and its usage for public enjoyment; grooming existing trails, constructing new ones, maintaining structures, and ensuring that the land is as accessible as possible for all to enjoy. And every land trust will tell you that it is worth it! Trails connect people to the land and to each other.

There is still significant need for these grants, with a large remaining backlog of requests. If restored, this bonding would be the only source of funding available in 2019-20 that could be invested in a wide variety of recreational trail projects around the state – projects which often put the critical finishing touches on land conservation transactions.

We encourage you to raise the bonding level in the bill to \$3 million/year for both FY 2020 and FY 2021. This would be consistent with the level of bonding given as matching grants in 2018, and is a reasonable amount to support Connecticut's recreational trails and greenways on an ongoing annual basis.

Thank you for this opportunity to provide our comments. As always, we would be happy to answer any questions you may have and provide additional information about the wonderful land conservation work undertaken every day in communities across the state.

