

CONNECTICUT Land Conservation Council

Testimony on Governor's House Bill No. 7148
Appropriations Committee
Submitted by Amy Blaymore Paterson, Executive Director
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Co-Chairs Osten and Walker and members of the Appropriations 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 concerning **HB 7148, An Act Concerning the State Budget for the Biennium Ending June Thirtieth 2021, and Making Appropriations Therefor** (Governor's Budget) as it relates to several priorities from our 2019 Conservation Agenda.

Community Investment Act (CIA): CLCC has concerns with the budget recommendation to transfer the CIA from an off-budget account to the General Fund. The CIA was established as a dedicated account outside of the budget to provide consistent funding for open space, farmland/dairy support, historic properties, and affordable housing programs.

Funded through a \$40 surcharge on local recording fees, the CIA has invested over \$153 million in 1,400+ projects across all four sectors -- benefiting every town in Connecticut. With respect to land conservation, the CIA is the only consistent source of funding for DEEP's Open Space and Watershed Land Acquisition Program (OSWA) -- the state's matching grant program for land trusts, municipalities and water companies seeking to conserve open space.

The proposed transfer would increase revenue in the General Fund by \$18.5 million, resulting in an appropriation of \$2.8 million to DEEP in each year of the biennium to support four staff, other expenses and open space grants. While we are pleased to see this appropriation, we are concerned about the long term stability of funding for the OSWA program. In particular, CIA funds previously dedicated to the OSWA program will now have to compete with other line items in the DEEP budget through the appropriations process. While the \$2.8 million may be secure in the current budget, future appropriations for the OSWA program are not guaranteed. In addition, the CIA generates approximately \$22-25 million per year. After the \$18.5 million are appropriated to the respective agencies, for what purposes will the balance of the CIA - generated funds be used?

Passport to Parks Program: CLCC was pleased to see Passport to Parks program revenues being utilized as intended in the Governor's budget proposal. Funded by a \$10 DMV registration charge, the Passport program supports state park maintenance as well as the Council on Environmental Quality, the Soil and Water Conservation Districts, and the Environmental Review Team. Moreover, under the Governor's Budget, the transfer of certain park-related staffing positions to the Passport program will result in a savings of over \$2.5 million in the next two fiscal years -- underscoring the benefits of this dedicated source of funding.

Department of Agriculture: We appreciate the Governor's strong commitment to agriculture, including the budget proposal to maintain the independence of the Department of Agriculture as a stand-alone agency.

Thank you for this opportunity to provide our comments. I would be happy to answer any questions you may have.

