



STATE OF CONNECTICUT

COUNCIL ON ENVIRONMENTAL QUALITY

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Executive Director

March 13, 2022

Re: House Bill 5296 - An Act Concerning the Open Space and Watershed Land Acquisition Grant Program

Honored Co-Chairs Sen. Cohen and Rep. Gresko, Vice Chairs Sen. Slap and Rep. Palm, Ranking Members Sen. Miner and Rep. Harding, and distinguished members of the Environment Committee,

The Council on Environmental Quality (Council) is a nine-member board that works independently of the Department of Energy and Environmental Protection to assess the condition of Connecticut's environment and report its findings annually to the Governor, recommend actions to improve state environmental programs, advise other state agencies on the environmental impacts of proposed projects, and investigate citizens' complaints and allegations of violations of environmental laws.

Connecticut's goal for open space acquisition by municipalities, water companies or nonprofit land conservation organizations is "not less than eleven per cent of the state's land area is held by municipalities, water companies or nonprofit land conservation organizations as open space" ([CGS Sec.23-8\(b\)](#)). Eleven percent would be 352,634 acres. The exact acreage conserved by those entities is not known but estimates put the total far short of the state goal.

The Council supports HB 5296 that would provide financial resources to the Department of Energy and Environmental Protection for the purpose of funding its Open Space and Watershed Land Acquisition Grant Program. Open space provides Connecticut's residents with options for outdoor activities, preservation of scenic beauty, habitat protection and increased biodiversity, water protection and flood control. In addition, forests, farmland and other natural habitats absorbed more than twelve percent of the nation's greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions. Land conservation offers a double benefit for the climate: it helps absorb GHG emissions and it prevents significant GHG emissions that would result from development. Increasing the Bond authorization for DEEP's Open Space and Watershed Land Acquisition Grant Program to 10 million dollars would be extremely effective in advancing the state's conservation goals.

Thank you for consideration of these comments.

Sincerely,

Peter Hearn,
Executive Director

