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LANDS
ALLIANCE**

A Project of American Farmland Trust

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Testimony Opposing SB 946 Section 29
Finance, Revenue, and Bonding Committee
Submitted by: Lisa Bassani, Project Director, Working Lands Alliance
March 9, 2015

Senator Fonfara, Representative Berger, and Committee members:

The Working Lands Alliance appreciates this opportunity to submit testimony in **strong opposition to Section 29 of SB 946**, An Act Concerning Revenue Items to Implement the Governor's Budget.

The Working Lands Alliance is a broad-based, statewide coalition dedicated to preserving Connecticut's farmland, and includes such organizations as American Farmland Trust, CT Forest & Park Association, CT Farmland Trust, End Hunger CT!, CT Farm Bureau, CT Land Conservation Council, among many others. Our efforts focus on increasing the pace of farmland preservation in the state and advancing the economic viability of Connecticut agriculture.

Our coalition strongly opposes Section 29b of SB 946, which proposes a complete sweep of Community Investment Act (CIA) funds from 1/1/16 through 6/30/17. This type of sweep is unprecedented and would have a devastating effect on the Community Investment Act, which provides a dedicated funding source for worthwhile investments across four sectors: Agriculture/Farmland Preservation, Open Space, Historic Preservation, and Affordable Housing.

The results of this legislation – passed in 2005 with bipartisan support – are undeniable. In fact, the impact of the Community Investment Act has exceeded all expectations. Over the last decade, CIA has made over \$133 million in investments spread across nearly every community in the state (to date, over 1300 projects in 165 municipalities). The kinds of investments range from the protection of prime farmland in the small town of Columbia, to preservation of historic sculptures in Hartford's Bushnell Park, to the protection of needed farmland and open space in one of the most urban parts of Bloomfield, to the development of supportive, affordable housing for disabled veterans in Jewett City. The list of worthwhile projects goes on and on, and continues to grow as new investments are funded through CIA.

However, this would all come to a halt with the proposed diversion of all CIA monies to the General Fund. Within the agricultural sector alone, the proposal in the Governor's budget would directly impact 9 programs that rely on CIA funding. Highlighted below are a few of these key programs that directly benefit Connecticut farmers:

- Agricultural Sustainability Account, providing needed support to our dairy farmers to help them withstand the drastic swings in national milk pricing
- Farmland Preservation Program, which purchases agricultural easements on prime farmland throughout the state (This includes funding for 3 staffpeople within the Farmland Preservation Unit, who are supported through CIA administrative dollars. This sweep would present a double hit to the Department, which would be forced to pull resources from other programs to backfill the administrative support that was lost.)
- Agricultural Viability and Farm Transition grant programs, which include invaluable support for farm production projects (ie. Purchase of farm equipment and fencing, energy efficiency improvements to the production facility, etc.)

These programs directly support the economic viability of Connecticut farms, create jobs, and improve the quality of life in Connecticut – just as the CIA dollars do across the other 3 sectors that share the proceeds of the recording fee. The complete sweep of these funds proposed in the Governor's budget would dramatically impact the CIA and threaten the many CIA investments that are pending across the state.

We also remind this Committee that this forward-thinking legislation was structured to provide a dedicated funding source for these worthwhile investments, so that our efforts were not dependent on unreliable bond funding or subject to cuts during difficult budget seasons. Our coalition strongly urges this Committee to evaluate the impact CIA has had statewide, and preserve the integrity of the CIA account.

On behalf of the Working Lands Alliance, I urge this committee to oppose Section 29(b) of SB 946.