



March 5, 2018

Re: H.B. 5035, An Act Adjusting the State Budget for the Biennium ending June 30, 2019

Dear Chairman Formica, Chairwoman Osten, Chairwoman Walker, Ranking Member Ziobron, and Members of the Appropriations Committee:

Audubon Connecticut, the state office of the National Audubon Society, is one of Connecticut's premier conservation and environmental education organizations. With four Chapters, nearly 17,000 members, supporters, and partners across the state, through land stewardship, science, education, and advocacy, we work to preserve habitat and protect bird species that are of state, national and global concern. Our mission is to conserve and restore natural ecosystems, focusing on birds, other wildlife, and their habitats for the benefit of humanity and the earth's biological diversity.

The testimony we are providing today focuses on the budget of the Department of Energy and Environmental Protection (DEEP.) We recognize the state's budget constraints and the difficulties in balancing a budget by this Committee. As budget negotiations unfold, we hope you will oppose disproportionate cuts and legislative initiatives that undermine our state's conservation and energy programs, all of which contribute to a healthy economy in our state. There are a few critical observations we'd like the Committee to keep in mind as budget discussions and decisions unfold:

The **Council on Environmental Quality** provides an array of services that are a complement to the programs that DEEP provides. Each year, CEQ produces a reliable and valuable independent analysis of trends in environmental issues in our state and this helps guide the implementation not only of public programs through DEEP, but non-profit and private sector efforts as well. It is vital to protect CEQ and preserve adequate funding levels. The Council is already doing more with less.

On a final note, "**Thank-You!**" for establishing the **Passport to Parks Program**. We are thrilled at the dedicated revenues that we will be used to support the operation and maintenance of our state parks. We respectfully request the following to protect the program's integrity: **1.)** Ensure the program stays a dedicated, non-lapsing account; **2.)** Remove current diversions to the General Fund (H.B. 5035, Sections 9 & 28). The Passports to the Parks includes built-in diversion of \$5 million "surplus" funds to the General Fund in FY 2019 in anticipation of revenue of \$16 million projected in the budget. Until revenues are actually collected, it is premature to set an amount for the diversion. **3.)** Oppose exemptions to the Passport to Parks fee. Why should one type of vehicle or group not have to pay the fee while still enjoying all the benefits? This needs to be fair across the board.

Thank you for your consideration and we look forward to working with you.

Genese Leach, Policy Manager