



**Testimony
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Connecticut Council of Small Towns
Before the
Appropriations Committee
February 19, 2021**

RE: Conservation & Development Agencies - HB-6439 (COMM) AN ACT CONCERNING THE STATE BUDGET FOR THE BIENNIUM ENDING JUNE THIRTIETH, 2023, AND MAKING APPROPRIATIONS THEREFOR.

Enhancing Broadband Access

The Connecticut Council of Small Towns (COST) supports provisions in the Governor's proposed budget to expand and improve broadband access across the state.

Residents, students, businesses, and state and local governments are depending heavily on reliable high speed Internet access during the COVID-19 pandemic. Distance learning, virtual meetings and public hearings, Telehealth medical services, and Work from Home policies have underscored the importance of making sure that everyone has reliable Internet service.

Recognizing this, the Governor's proposed budget includes funding for the Office of Policy and Management to develop a statewide broadband map to identify unserved and underserved areas in Connecticut. This is a critical step in developing a plan to provide reliable broadband access for all residents and businesses in Connecticut.

The proposed budget also includes funding for the Public Utilities Regulatory Authority (PURA) to develop a One Touch Make Ready process to streamline efforts to connect fiber to utility poles. Adopting a One Touch Make Ready process will result in a faster, more efficient process for connecting high speed cable to utility poles to better address Connecticut's broadband needs.

A One Touch Make Ready process will be a game changer for many communities throughout Connecticut, including rural areas that are unserved or underserved by cable providers. One Touch Make Ready has proven successful in other states in expediting the process and reducing costs associated with attaching new facilities to utility poles. In addition, holding pole owners accountable for issuing permits in a timely manner will address delays that have hampered efforts to meet Connecticut's broadband needs.



Supporting Arts, Culture & Tourism

The Connecticut Council of Small Towns (COST) ***supports*** provisions in Governor Lamont's proposed budget which provide additional funding to support the arts, culture, and tourism sector in Connecticut.

Tourism is Connecticut's 8th largest industry, supporting more than 80,000 jobs directly related to tourism and more than 120,000 jobs supported by tourism activities. According to the state's Office of Tourism, "interesting small towns" is one of the things potential travelers to New England are searching for. And, as many residents and travelers know, Connecticut has a rich array of small towns and cities.

Promoting tourism also generates significant tax revenue and spending in local businesses, strengthening our state and local economies. The additional funding included in the proposed budget will position Connecticut to better promote the arts, culture, and tourism sector in our state.

Promoting Housing Opportunities

COST ***supports*** provisions in Governor Lamont's proposed budget which increase funding for various housing programs.

Promoting greater housing choice and economic diversity in our communities to help address racial disparities is a critical public policy goal that warrants a thoughtful, comprehensive approach. Assisting municipalities in guiding the development of more affordable, more attainable housing opportunities in their communities is a key part of this approach.

The state has a number of existing programs that have proven very successful in facilitating the development of affordable housing in a wide range of towns, including the state's Flexible Affordable Housing Program (Flex) which supports quality, affordable housing opportunities for Connecticut residents, promotes and supports homeownership and mixed income developments, and assists in the revitalization of urban and rural centers.

The Governor's proposed budget calls for an additional \$100 million in bond funding for the Flex program, which has a proven track record of supporting the development of small scale housing developments to provide greater housing opportunities and economic diversity in our communities.



The proposed budget also calls for new bond authorizations for the Housing Trust Fund of \$55 million in FY 22 and \$50 million in FY 23. This program encourages the creation of homeownership housing for low and moderate income families, promotes the rehabilitation, preservation and production of rental housing and the development of housing which aids the revitalization of communities.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the proposed budget.

COST is an advocacy organization committed to giving small towns a strong voice in the legislative process.