



Creating Great Communities For All
**Connecticut Chapter of the
American Planning Association**

Testimony regarding

Proposed Bill No. 6647– AN ACT CONCERNING GEOGRAPHIC INFORMATION SYSTEMS

CCAPA strongly supports this bill as an important **first step** to having a robust and coordinated statewide geographic information system (GIS). This bill represents the initial result of a year-long effort that was led in part by the CCAPA, along with Rep. McCarthy Vahey, Sen. Needleman, and a GIS Working Group of nearly two-dozen GIS experts and stakeholders. We all have long recognized that our current disorganized, decentralized, scattered way of collecting and sharing geographic information places Connecticut at a competitive and public safety disadvantage. Re-constituting and strengthening a Geographic Information Systems Advisory Council and creating the position of Geographic Information Officer (GIO) with a specific charge to improve our systems of acquiring, standardizing, aggregating, and sharing of geospatial data is an enormously useful action.

We note, however, that this bill only reflects a portion of the Working Group's recommendations to achieve a functional and effective Statewide GIS Center. The Advisory Council and the Officer **must be supported by stable staffing and funding**. A single employee existing within the OPM bureaucracy cannot take on this responsibility alone. The GIS Center must have some autonomy of function so as not to become some vestigial arm of another OPM bureau. The GIO must be supported by, at a minimum, three additional employees (two technicians and one administrator) to undertake the complex work of pulling together all of the state's GIS resources across departments, agencies, and partners. Further, a stable funding stream must be put in place to ensure that this Center can recruit and retain excellent talent, as well as to plan for the regular acquisition of statewide data, through aerial photography, LiDAR flights, and other coordinated efforts.

We recognize that adding State staff and funding for regular data acquisition to this bill will create a "fiscal note" that may make passage of this proposal more challenging. Cost estimates for the proposed staffing and data acquisition sinking fund are, to our understanding, between \$1.5 and \$2 million per year. While this is an important cost to consider, in the words of a former Chief Data Officer for the State of Connecticut, this is "a rounding error of a rounding error." The current cost to the State in lost productivity because data is too hard to find or coordinate; the cost of hundreds of local, state, and private agencies duplicating efforts unnecessarily; the cost to the State in economic competitiveness because all of our neighboring states have better and more coordinated GIS networks; the cost to our State in threats to our public health and safety during emergencies, natural disasters, or pandemics - all of these costs make the comparatively tiny cost of this GIS Center seem like the bargain of the century. At some point, we need to see projects like this not as "costs" but as "critical investments" in the economic and public safety future of Connecticut.

We very much appreciate the efforts of legislative leaders and the GIS Working Group in keeping this issue on the agenda. This bill is an excellent start, but it can be so much more.

WHO WE ARE

The Connecticut Chapter of the American Planning Association (CCAPA) has over 420 members who are governmental and consulting planners, land use attorneys, citizen planners, and other professionals engaged in planning and managing land use, economic development, housing, transportation, and conservation for local, regional, and State governments, private businesses and other entities. CCAPA has long been committed to assisting the legislature and State agencies with developing and furthering responsible growth management principles. The APA is an independent, not-for-profit, national educational organization that provides leadership in the development of vital communities.

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