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Testimony of Eric Hammerling, Executive Director, Connecticut Forest & Park Association

Public Hearing Subject Matter	Position
<b>Raised SB 965: AN ACT PROVIDING FUNDING FOR THE REMOVAL OF HAZARDOUS OR DEAD TREES BY MUNICIPALITIES.</b>	Support

The Connecticut Forest & Park Association (CFPA) is the first nonprofit conservation organization established in Connecticut in 1895. For over 128 years, CFPA has offered testimony before the General Assembly on various State Park and Forest, trail recreation, sustainable forestry, and land conservation issues.

Over the past decade or so, I Chaired the State Vegetation Management Task Force created by the Two Storms Panel, Chaired the Forests Subgroup of the Governor’s Council on Climate Change, and most recently Chaired a diverse group of organizations to develop Policies on Resilient Forests for Connecticut’s Future (PRFCT Future).

All of my efforts have been based upon the premise that trees and forests provide a wide variety of socioeconomic, ecosystem, and other benefits, and that we all share an important responsibility in how we steward their present and future. With a changing climate and a new normal of more intense weather events and stressors on trees, this is especially important and increasingly difficult.

This bill would authorize \$15 million for “hazardous tree removal or trimming for nonutility-related hazardous branches, limbs and trees on municipal property or within a municipal right-of-way” in Sec. 7-536 (3)(e). It is clear that municipalities need funding to better address public safety issues associated with hazardous trees, and as an added benefit, this funding would help municipalities be less reliant on utilities and ratepayers for support in managing local roadside forests.

This funding would not apply to utility-related hazardous trees or to caring for healthy trees inside and outside of the utility protection zone (UPZ), or planting new trees, or removing stumps to allow for re-plantings, and other important tree stewardship needs with which communities are wrestling mightily. It would help municipalities even more if the funding authorized in this bill could also support municipal efforts to maintain healthy trees in addition to addressing the important issues associated with declining tree health that are already included in the bill.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on this important bill, and I’d be glad to respond to any questions you may have.