

Testimony to House Appropriations on behalf of FC Conservation District

Good morning, Madam Chair and Committee:

I am here today to ask for your support of Vermont's 14 Natural Resources Conservation Districts, specifically an increase in base funding for a total base appropriation of \$3,000,000 in the NRCC line item within the Agency of Agriculture's budget. This is an increase of \$2,638,000 to help address chronic underfunding of Vermont's Natural Resources Conservation Districts and to support their operational costs. Conservation Districts were established across the county following the Dust Bowl to protect natural resources, and increased state appropriations are needed for our conservation districts to meet their statutory obligations.

Vermont's Natural Resources Conservation Districts are trusted and effective members of the agricultural and conservation community. Conservation District Managers and staff are well-equipped with technical ability, training, and knowledge to address the unique needs of local landowners as well as state natural resource concerns. Operating with boots on the ground, Conservation Districts partner with state and federal Agencies to help implement conservation and environmental policy goals at the local level. They are rooted in the communities they serve, and they serve every community across Vermont.

I attended an event hosted by the Franklin County Natural Resources Conservation District this past Fall, where we toured a willow nursery that the District manages. The nursery is used to grow and provide a native Willow species to local landowners, which they can plant along rivers and streambeds to protect the riparian corridor. The District itself also conducts large-scale tree plantings, providing clear environmental benefits. Protecting our rivers and improving regional water quality is one of the many program areas that Conservation Districts specialize in to protect our state's natural resources at the local level.

Last year, the Legislature supported increased funding to the Natural Resources Conservation Council to help Districts stabilize and build capacity to deliver core services and make needed equipment and facility improvements. This cycle, Vermont's 14 Natural Resources Conservation Districts are requesting a base appropriation of \$3,000,000 starting in FY24 to help cover ongoing operational and training costs. The House Agriculture,

Food Resiliency & Forestry Committee supported this funding request in their budget memo to this Committee. I join them in asking for your support to increase base funding for the Vermont Natural Resources Conservation Council by \$2,638,000 for a total base appropriation of \$3 million, to be dispersed among our 14 Districts.

Thank you for your time today.