

Western Connecticut COUNCIL OF GOVERNMENTS



March 12, 2022

Esteemed Chairs Cohen and Gresko,
Members of the Environment Committee:

The Western Connecticut Council of Governments (WestCOG) appreciates the opportunity to comment on House Bill 5296, *An Act Concerning the Open Space and Watershed Land Acquisition (OWSLA) Program*. WestCOG **supports** this bill. However, the **funding level is inadequate, given the unprecedented funding available through the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (IIJA)**.

IIJA is expected to provide \$2.5 to \$3.0 billion in FEMA Flood Mitigation Assistance (FMA) grants over five years. FMA provides grants to reduce or eliminate the risk of repetitive flood damage to buildings insured by the National Flood Insurance Program (NFIP). A major activity under this program is the acquisition of flooded properties (and if, desired, relocation of property owners); property bought under the program becomes open space.

Connecticut may only represent for 1% of the nation's population, **but it accounts for over 11% of repetitive and severe repetitive loss NFIP properties. Connecticut could receive as much as \$330 million (11%) if the state submits competitive grant applications under IIJA FMA – including required matching funds – or as low as \$0 if it does not.**

Most FMA grants entail a 25% local cost share, with lower percentages for repetitive loss (10%) and severe repetitive loss (0%) structures. COGs and municipalities do not have these funds available, so state assistance is needed. \$330 million works out to a maximum of \$16.5 million in state funds needed per year over the next five years, assuming a 25% local cost share.

IIJA funding represents a generational opportunity reduce flood exposure and damage and to move people out of harm's way. WestCOG strongly urges your Committee to increase funding under the OWSLA or another program to serve as the local match for FMA grants, so that the state does not miss out on this opportunity.

Should you have questions, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Thank you for your consideration.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Francis R. Pickering". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a horizontal line underlining the name.

Francis R. Pickering
Executive Director