



# Friends of Gillette Castle State Park

Preserving a Connecticut treasure ~ Celebrating a theatrical icon

## **Testimony in support of SB12, specifically the increased bonding investment of \$15 million for State Parks Infrastructure included in Section 11**

March 29, 2022

The Friends of Gillette Castle State Park is an all-volunteer nonprofit with a mission of promoting and protecting the unique Gillette Castle and its scenic grounds.

The Friends are in strong support of SB 12, specifically the increased bonding investment of \$15 million for State Parks infrastructure included in Section 11 of the bill.

As you know, overall, DEEP has identified a backlog of nearly \$130 million in critical maintenance, repairs, and other infrastructure improvement projects at State Parks. Some investments are necessary to renovate historic structures, but significant investments are also required to ensure facilities are more accessible to all, especially to those with mobility challenges. At Gillette Castle State Park, currently critical needs are window restoration (neglected for over 20 years), improvements in accessibility, and vital improvements in drainage along eroding roadways – during a significant storm in 2021 we had significant trail erosion that washed out onto the public “Ferry road.” The immensely popular train trail hike has an important trestle that has been in disrepair and closed for many years.

Over the winter of 2021, the Friends of Gillette, in partnership with DEEP, erected a tarp to cover the roof of the home of Yukitaka Osaki, a historically important structure on the ferry landing. Yukitaka was a Japanese expatriot who served as William Gillette’s confidante, valet and right-hand man. Over the course of living on the river landing for many years, Yukitake became beloved of the local community, and they rallied to prevent his threatened internment during the dark years of WWII. This historic structure is at risk of collapse and requires urgent attention before it is lost.

On behalf of the Friends of Gillette Castle, we encourage Committee members to consider the need for capital investments in Connecticut’s State Parks and support bonding in SB 12 for infrastructure improvements that are necessary, and in fact are overdue, to sustain the many values that State Parks provide to all of us.

Thank you for the important work you do, and for the opportunity to testify today on this bill.

Lynn Wilkinson

President, Friends of Gillette Castle State Park