



Illinois General Assembly

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Legislators Urge Governor to Release Soil & Water Conservation District Funds

Springfield, IL – With Soil & Water Conservation Districts (SWCD) across Illinois facing new financial hardships, State Representative David Reis (R-Willow Hill) and the Association of Soil & Water Conservation Districts, alongside a bi-partisan group of legislators, are urging Governor Blagojevich to release the remaining Fiscal Year 2008 SWCD funds.

The FY08 State Budget appropriated \$7.4 million for SWCD operational expenses and \$6.0 million for the Partners for Conservation Program (formerly Conservation 2000) through the Department of Agriculture. As of April 1, only \$1.7 million of the \$7.4 million appropriation has been released to SWCDs and none of the \$6.0 million appropriated for the Conservation Practices Program has been released.

Last month, Representative David Reis and fellow legislators sent a letter to the Governor asking him to immediately release the remaining funds for SWCDs. Representative Reis is deeply concerned that SWCDs will be forced to close if the funds are not released.

“Our soil and water conservation districts are in a dire financial situation,” Reis said. “Many districts will have to consider laying-off staff or closing their doors if the remaining funds are not released. That would hurt conservation efforts and negatively impact our farmers and families throughout Illinois.”

State Senator John O. Jones (R-Mt. Vernon) echoed the concerns of Representative Reis.

“Our local soil and water conservation districts need to know when their funds are going to be released. If they do not have the state funds released soon, many of our local SWCDs will be forced to shut down their offices,” Jones said. “This is just another example of the Governor playing political football with a crucial downstate agricultural program.”

Richard Nichols, Executive Director of the Association of Illinois Soil & Water Conservation Districts, discussed the importance of the districts to Illinois.

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“One of the very important things soil and water conservation districts do is assist in the application of conservation practices to agricultural and urban lands that reduce storm water run off, thereby reducing flooding,” Nichols said. “The loss of funding for staff and programs will severely impact the ability to provide this important benefit for the people of Illinois.”

Illinois’ 98 SWCDs, and their approximately 250 employees, represent the state’s frontline in protecting rivers, streams and other water sources against contamination from urban storm water and agricultural chemicals and sediment. SWCDs assist in delivering programs that prevent erosion from urban development and tillable soil that threatens Illinois’ agricultural economy and the sustainability of surface water supplies. The investment of State funds in the operational expenses of SWCDs ensures the distribution to Illinois of about \$250 million from the federal farm bill and other sources.

Several other legislators spoke of the need to release the funds for SWCDs.

“These funds are desperately needed for the quality of life in our communities,” said Rep. Thomas Holbrook (D-Belleville).

State Representative Ron Stephens (R-Greenville) believes this is not only a water safety issue, but also a jobs issue.

“It is vital to the safety of our water supplies that the soil and water conservation districts receive the funding needed to run their facilities,” Stephens said. “The jobs of many people are on the line and we must make sure that they get the money promised to them to keep their departments running.”

The bi-partisan group of legislators has filed House Resolution 1127, which urges the Governor to immediately release the remaining \$5.75 million for SWCDs and the \$6.0 million for the Conservation Practices Program.

Many other legislators attended the Statehouse press conference to show their support for soil and water conservation districts and HR 1127. These include State Representatives Mike Bost, Rich Brauer, Sandy Cole, Shane Cultra, Lisa Dugan, Roger Eddy, Bob Flider, Careen Gordon, Bill Mitchell, Jerry Mitchell, Brandon Phelps, Raymond Poe, Dan Reitz, Mike Smith, Jil Tracy and Patrick Verschoore.

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