**The Pennsylvania Association of Conservation Districts (PACD) is requesting an increase in the Pennsylvania Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) and Pennsylvania Department of Agriculture (PDA) “Conservation District Fund” lines in the 2022-2023 budget to $5.010 million in DEP and $1.738 million in PDA for a total of $6.748 million to adequately cover the costs incurred by the districts for the following reasons:**

* The State’s support of Conservation Districts is inadequate and inequitable.
* The Conservation District Fund lines in the DEP and PDA annual state budget have not increased since 2004-2005 fiscal year.
* The inadequate funding for Districts has limited their ability to retain trained and experienced staff which negatively affects the efficient delivery of programs and services.
* Despite the static funding, conservation districts have continued to administer programs for the State, review NPDES permits, provide assistance to farmers, assist municipalities in preparing to fix low volume roads and dirt and gravel roads, conduct inspections that threaten public health from environmental occurrences and so much more, but now some are being forced to return programs to the State and limit services to the local constituents.  These are all important functions that benefit the citizens of PA as well as the businesses who are employers in the construction, agriculture, food service, and local government areas.
* The State is not staffed to address all local issues, but it is vital to local economies to process earth disturbance permit applications quickly, ensuring construction projects begin as soon as possible.  Just as importantly, it is crucial for conservation districts to provide technical services to the local agricultural community so they can qualify for important federal agricultural support and aid programs.
* Despite the increased responsibilities for administering the State’s programs the depreciated value of State support for the programs covers an average of less than 10% of a district’s overall budget.
* Conservation districts need be able to continue conducting mosquito surveillance and control activities to try to minimize additional health threats like West Nile Virus, Zika Virus, and multiple other mosquito-borne diseases for public health protection.
* Even though conservation districts administer numerous state programs, in each case, conservation districts are only reimbursed for a percentage of their costs. The balance of the funding must come from other funding sources.
* Conservation Districts are not allowed to charge NPDES permit review and approval fees for PennDot projects, even though those reviews and approvals could cost districts a significant amount of money.
* Our budgetary request only amounts to $14,000 per position for the positions supported by the Conservation District Fund lines in the state budget and will not fully cover the costs per position or inflationary increases since 2004.
* Conservation districts are in a perfect position to help the agricultural community find resources to continue farming while meeting environmental goals. However, districts need ag technicians to fulfill that role. Without technical staff, districts cannot assist landowners to procure the funding needed to include conservation practices in their agricultural operations.
* State funding is not distributed equally across the Commonwealth. Certain grant opportunities are sometimes watershed or otherwise geographically based, meaning these programs are not offered on a statewide basis. For instance, Chesapeake Bay CAP funding, the Conservation Excellence Grants are each only available to certain counties.
* UGW funding was meant to supplement state appropriations not replace them, but even with the supplemental UGWF funds CDFAP funds are not meeting most districts operational needs. The impact fee has been very beneficial and has helped provide conservation districts some supplemental support for their annual budgets. Unfortunately, some county governments have since reduced, or completely eliminated their funding allocations to districts because of the impact fee.