

**Written Testimony of the Honorable Eddie A. Perez, Mayor
Hartford, CT
February 27, 2006
S.B. 665 “An Act Concerning Eminent Domain Proceedings”
and
H.B. 5810, “An Act Limiting The Use of Eminent Domain By
Municipalities And Municipal Development Agencies And
Establishing An Office Of Property Rights Ombudsman”**

As I have stated previously in testimony before this Committee, I believe that eminent domain is a vital economic development tool for municipalities. Local elected officials throughout Connecticut face the challenge of providing a greater quality of life for their citizens while respecting an individual's right to homeownership. Having dealt in eminent domain proceedings before, I have compassion for those individuals that have lost their homes in eminent domain takings. I have a sense of the history and emotion that many attach to their homes. It is the place where education begins, families are raised, and values are formed. My compassion for homeowners does not, however, supersede my compassion for the other side of the equation, which is the issue of combating poverty, unemployment, and crime. In fact, I believe that municipal governments can have a great respect for homeownership while being dedicated to the economic development of their city or town.

As you know, I have made it a hallmark of my administration to improve and expand homeownership opportunities to residents of all income levels in Hartford. I continue to earmark City funds for homeownership initiatives such as Goodwin Estates, Stowe Village, and St. Monica's. In addition, I am working with State leaders to develop innovative ways to continue advocating for homeownership in the City of Hartford. At the same time, Hartford is growing as a City as a result of projects such as Adriaen's Landing and the Learning Corridor. These projects draw businesses and tourism into the City and have served as catalysts for Hartford's recent renaissance. Neither of these projects would have been possible without eminent domain as an economic development tool.

I am in support of developing ways to make eminent domain proceedings more amicable and amenable to individual property owners, particularly

owner occupied property owners. S.B. 665 outlines several initiatives that I believe will help to accomplish this goal. In particular, I believe that raising the amount of “just compensation” will benefit the negotiation process and will provide property owners a more appropriate price for their sacrifice. Also, I agree with the call for an increase in maximum payments for relocation assistance and believe that this will enable municipalities and property owners to transition more smoothly into finding suitable new homes for the parties involved.

I am also in support of greater communication and understanding between elected officials and citizens concerning eminent domain proceedings. I believe that if the government is fully transparent about economic development and eminent domain proceedings, the public will understand the benefits of proposed economic development and the importance of that development for the municipality. In addition, transparency and communication within all of these processes will allow community members to more fully support their neighbors and help to smooth both the eminent domain proceedings and the subsequent transition to a new home. I fully support the idea of having a State Property Rights Ombudsman.

I am against curbing the use of eminent domain for economic development. Eminent domain is an important economic development tool to maintain the City’s ability to continue to grow. Residents throughout Connecticut expect elected officials to provide a better quality of life for them. Economic development and growth are one of the best ways to provide this quality of life for our residents. Particularly in built-out cities, such as Hartford, it is absolutely necessary that the City be able to continue increasing its revenue streams from property taxes. There is a limited amount of taxable property in Hartford, so the City must continue to improve upon its existing infrastructure. If eminent domain for economic development was eliminated, built-out cities would not be able to make this improvement. It takes only a quick glance at the effect that the Learning Corridor and Adriaen’s Landing have had on the City and the Region to understand the importance of economic development in our State.

I am encouraged that the State Legislature has decided to address the level of distrust that has developed regarding the economic development process. I support the efforts to make the eminent domain process more comfortable for those property owners that are sacrificing their land for the greater good. I agree and fully support the efforts of the Legislature to make the entire

economic development process and eminent domain proceedings more transparent and understandable to the general public. I believe that a State Property Rights Ombudsman would be a great benefit to all of Connecticut's residents. I do not, however, support the elimination of eminent domain for economic development. I strongly object to any legislation that would curb municipalities' ability to create a greater quality of life for their residents. It is the responsibility of elected officials to provide continuously improving services and opportunities for the citizens of Connecticut. Eminent domain for economic development is a necessary tool for us to fulfill our responsibility to those that we represent.

Thank you.