Testimony before the Finance, Revenue and Bonding Committee Public Hearing March 13, 2007

# S.B. 1381 – AN ACT CONCERNING APPROPRIATIONS TO THE DEPARTMENTS OF SOCIAL SERVICES AND AGRICULTURE

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Distinguished members of the Finance, Revenue and Bonding Committee, thank you for this opportunity to address this committee today and to address the concerns of genealogists concerning S.B. 1381. I am Dr. Robert L. Rafford of Middlebury, Connecticut, and a semi-retired ordained minister. Genealogy has been my avocation and passion for over thirty-three years and for the past eleven years I have practiced full-time professional genealogical and historical research. I am the Municipal Historian of Middlebury, the past-president of the Connecticut Professional Genealogists Council, Inc., founder and Advisor to the Naugatuck Valley Genealogical Club, and belong to the Association of Professional Genealogists, the National Genealogical Society and many others.

Genealogists protest this attempt to raise costs by increasing, by **100%**, the fees now charged by registrars for vital record certificates. Here we are, for the third time in two years, trying to deal with a proposal to enact the same unwarranted burden on citizens. The reasons to oppose this new tax are virtually the same as they were for the past two years:

- The proposed legislation will hurt genealogists, especially new ones, who need a copy of all their relatives' vital records, not just those of "direct" ancestors.
- These are public records, and any action that would result in a greater hardship in obtaining copies of the records of the people is not a wise one. There are enough hurdles placed in the way of citizens' access of the records of their government, some arbitrarily imposed by town clerks.
- Towns already have sufficient revenue. Tax monies *already* pay for the costs of registrars. If town clerks' budgets are not sufficient, the recourse is to petition the town for more money, not to constantly increase the cost of citizens' access to our records.
- The only reasons we have heard to raise these fees are that "we have not raised our fees in so many years" and "other places charge more" Registrars do not even keep statistics on how many vital records they sell each year; hence, they do not know how much of a burden this will produce on citizens' pocketbooks. Do we have to do what others do simply because they do it? The state is anticipating a budgetary surplus again this year. If town clerks' offices require more money, and we believe most of them do, responsible town budgets are the way to help them.
- In 2000, the Historic Records Preservation Act was passed due to the efforts of genealogists. I initiated that effort and it has since grossed over 20 million additional dollars for town clerks to preserve, store and computerize their records. In 2005 a bill required an additional fee of $30.00 for each real estate filing, another windfall for towns. At least $1.00 of each $30 fee presently goes to town clerks directly for their expenses, and the clerks are negotiating for more.

Before 2001, *not for identification purposes* copies, that is, non-certified copies, useful in most cases to genealogists, could be obtained for $1.00 or less each. In 2001 the legislature passed P.A. 01-163, a bill which mandated that only *certified* copies of vital records may be issued by registrars to genealogists. To double the fee would substantially discourage many seasoned genealogists, but especially budding family historians, from collecting the records they need.

If you must impose a higher fee we respectfully propose that the present bill be modified to…

- Provide a more modest fee increase. Even raising the fee to $6.00 or $7.00 is a 20 to 40% increase over the present fee, and would result in a significant increase in revenue to town clerks.
- Provide a measure to allow registrars to issue "Not for Legal Purposes" copies as they once did, for a lower fee. Most genealogists do not need certified copies for their research. This measure would have the added effect of addressing security measures. If these documents were clearly marked "Not for Identification Purposes," they could not be used for any other purposes.