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April 9, 2007

Testimony before the Judiciary Committee

SB 1480: An Act Concerning the Chief Court Administrator and the Probate Court Administrator

In Favor

Good afternoon, Chairman McDonald, Chairman Lawlor, Ranking and otherwise esteemed members of the Judiciary Committee. I'm Senator Eileen Daily of the 33rd District; I'm here to encourage your favorable consideration of SB1480, An Act Concerning the Chief Court Administrator and the Probate Court Administrator.

The Probate Court system as it stands is in urgent need of systemic reform. In it, we have an archaic Feudal system that should no longer exist in the 21st century. Under the present structure the peasants – individual Probate Court districts – pay tithe to the baron – the Probate Court administrator. The baron then decides autonomously which of the peasants may have computer systems, which may have in-service training, and the baron dictates specific practices on an individual basis.

The baron's budget is allowed to grow with no checks or balances. In fact, that budget has grown more than 52% over the past five years. New programs often begin without any budget whatsoever. The poor peasants have no say in hiring, no input into any increase in the number of staff positions, and no voice in how their benefits are handled.

As a matter of interest, you should know a less expensive health insurance arrangement was suggested by the peasants but refused without explanation by the baron, even though the peasants pay for part of that benefit.

My personal opinion is that Connecticut (like the rest of New England, for that matter) has far too many replicated systems and services for effective operation. It is, however, part of our tradition and I have never seen success when traditions are arbitrarily blown

apart. It must be noted that my First Selectman 'cronies' in the 33rd District have voted to keep their local probate courts; they are not opposed to voluntary consolidations but vehemently oppose State coercion in this matter.

In fact, an independent, district-wide survey confirmed that the majority of the taxpayers I represent want to maintain their local courts as well.

All public officials are sensitive to the growing burden of local property taxes. I have stated repeatedly that in order to control them we must reduce municipal costs. But *forcing* consolidation on the courts or any other local service will only bring opposition and eventually chaos.

For my part, I am working diligently with members of the Finance Committee to offer elective alternatives in order to consolidate local duplicative systems through incentives and voluntary compliance. I ask you to do no less. More specifically, I ask for immediate reforms in the administrative system of the Probate Courts as a prototype to serve as an effective beginning to additional cost-cutting through regionalization.

Thank you very much.

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