



**Testimony of Barton Russell**  
**Executive Director, Connecticut Council of Small Towns**  
**Before the Government Administration & Elections Committee**  
**of the Connecticut General Assembly**  
**February 29, 2008**

My name is Bart Russell, and I'm the Executive Director of the Connecticut Council of Small Towns. COST represents the interests of the State's smaller suburban and rural communities.

COST would like to take this opportunity to outline concerns relative to **HB-5029, An Act Concerning the Ethics Code for Government Officials.**

At this juncture, any effort to mandate municipal ethics policies is premature. Last session, the legislature passed a bill establishing an eight-member task force to study the Office of State Ethics' recommendations for implementing a municipal ethics code and report its findings and recommendations to the Government Administration and Elections Committee by January 1, 2009. The task force has been duly appointed and will begin work shortly on this needed review.

We are also concerned that HB-5029 mandates that towns adopt an ethics policy consistent with a model code which has not yet been established by the Citizen's Ethics Advisory Board. Inasmuch as the model code is not yet adopted or even contemplated, it is, again, premature to discuss mandating towns to adopt the code. The ramifications of a mandatory ethics policy cannot be fully and fairly considered when the components of such policy have not yet been outlined by the Advisory Board.

The proposal also requires each municipality to adopt a policy for the disclosure of financial interests of its public officials and employees. We are very concerned that mandatory disclosure policies would significantly reduce the number of individuals ready to serve their community as town employees, public service volunteers or candidates for local office. Small towns are finding it difficult to attract good candidates for certain town positions because they simply cannot match the salaries and benefit packages available in the private sector. Although we understand the purpose of this proposed requirement, COST fears that the provision will cause many people who are currently sitting on town boards and commissions to resign. We are also extremely worried that it will have a chilling effect on potential office holders and commission members in small towns that might well decide to take a pass on community involvement as a public official because of personal privacy concerns. The vast majority of Connecticut's grassroots government leaders - 1<sup>st</sup> selectmen, mayors and managers - have a proud record of accomplishment that should be applauded.

We therefore urge lawmakers to hold off on passing any mandatory ethics policies at this time. The work of the task force and the experience of towns that have newly adopted municipal ethics policies will provide us with the knowledge we need to craft a sound municipal ethics policy that can be shared with other communities. Until this task force makes its final report, we should move carefully on any proposals regarding municipal ethics.

COST remains committed to working with the committee to develop effective public policies pertaining to ethics and other intergovernmental issues and looks forward to working with you towards this end. Thank you for your kind consideration. Please contact me at 860-676-0770 if you have any questions.