



Testimony of Barton Russell
Executive Director, Connecticut Council of Small Towns
Before the Government Administration & Elections Committee
of the Connecticut General Assembly
February 25, 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.

I appreciate having the opportunity to testify today in support of **Raised Bill 5506, An Act Concerning a Municipal Ethics Pilot Program.**

COST appreciates the Committee's policy leadership in the government ethics arena, an issue with which our members are deeply concerned. We therefore support the bill, which creates a *voluntary* municipal ethics pilot program for up to ten towns and cities.

In the past, we have opposed efforts to mandate municipal ethics policies because we were concerned that a mandatory policy that included financial disclosure requirements would severely reduce the availability of local public service volunteers and people willing to run for local office as well as impose yet another expensive unfunded mandate that will cause substantial financial problems for towns. Moreover, a one-size-fits-all policy is clearly not the answer to ethics reform. We were also concerned that such proposals failed to recognize that the vast majority of Connecticut's grassroots government leaders - 1st selectmen, mayors and managers - have a proud record of accomplishment that should be applauded.

By piloting a municipal ethics program, however, we can develop some valuable knowledge regarding how to craft a municipal ethics policy that can be shared with other communities. Coupled with the work of the Municipal Ethics Commission, which will be convened in the next few weeks, Connecticut towns should have a solid foundation of knowledge and experience available to help them develop sound municipal ethics policies that meets the needs of their communities. Until this commission makes its final report, we should move carefully on any proposals mandating municipal ethics policies.

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.