



**Testimony
Bart Russell
Connecticut Council of Small Towns (COST)
Before the Planning & Development Committee
of the Connecticut General Assembly
March 3, 2008**

Good morning Senator Coleman, Representative Feltman and members of the Committee. My name is Bart Russell and I am the Executive Director of the Connecticut Council of Small Towns.

I am here to testify in opposition to Raised Bill 442 - An Act Concerning Authority of Boards of Selectmen and the Value of Property Necessary for Eligibility to Vote.

COST's Board of Directors had the opportunity to review and discuss similar legislation last year. The consensus was and continues to be that the present Town Meeting system works well and there have been few, if any, concerns raised in towns concerning the work and decisions of the Board of Selectmen.

If citizens disagree with the decisions of the Board of Selectmen, they have an opportunity every two to four years to make their displeasure known in the voting kiosk during municipal elections. They also have the opportunity to voice their disapproval during the public comment period at Board meetings, in the press, in letters or phone calls, and, as many of our first selectman can attest, in the grocery store or the local pharmacy. In addition, towns generally have a simple petition process to allow voters to require a Town Meeting on *any* issue. When our citizens are upset about something, it appears they definitely exercise their right of free speech!

COST strongly supports a Town Meeting form of government. The Town Meeting is a wonderful system for determining budgets, bonding issues and ordinances. However, this bill would require Town Meetings on any number of administrative decision-making and operational issues, which are best left to officials elected to represent the taxpayer and citizen.

The reality is that unless an issue is controversial, only a small fraction of the townspeople attend Town Meetings. Some towns have reported that on some issues, they are lucky if they get 3 or 4 people in attendance. If town meetings were required to be held on issues such as the contract with the Visiting Nurses Association, only a handful of people would attend. The vast majority of the people rely on their elected representatives to make decisions affecting the town.

Moreover, the type of issues the bill shifts to the Town Meeting would simply be too cumbersome to resolve at a Town Meeting, where it is difficult to build consensus and ensure that attendees have a complete understanding of the complexities of an issue. These are the type of issues that people would rather leave to their First Selectmen and Boards of Selectmen.

In addition, requiring additional Town Meetings on such issues would place added expenses on towns. To notice a Town meeting, legal notices must be placed in a newspaper, registrars of voters and assessors must be in attendance to validate the voters and a moderator must be selected.