



TESTIMONY

of the

CONNECTICUT CONFERENCE OF MUNICIPALITIES

to the

PLANNING & DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE

March 3, 2008

The Connecticut Conference of Municipalities appreciates the opportunity to testify on the following bill of interest to towns and cities:

R.B. 374, "An Act Concerning Financial and Management of Audits of Municipalities"

CCM has concerns with this bill.

This bill would require the state auditors to audit the books and accounts of any municipality that receives more than 35% of its revenue from the state.

Local officials are willing to work with legislators to find appropriate ways to increase the efficiency and accountability of municipalities – when there is a significant reconfiguration of the property tax system. Absent that, this bill seems duplicative of present municipal audit requirements – audits that are filed with the State.

See over for a list of accountability measures endorsed by the Blue Ribbon Commission on Property Tax Burdens and Smart Growth Initiatives – these measures are to be coupled with structural reform of the property tax system.

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If you have any questions, please call Ron Thomas, CCM's Manager of State and Federal Relations, or Gian-Carl Casa, CCM Director of Legislative Services, at (203) 498-3000.

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From "Report of the State of Connecticut Blue Ribbon Commission on Property Tax Burdens and Smart Growth Incentives"

G. A New and Expanded Role for Councils of Government (COGs)

1. Councils of Government (COGs) should be encouraged to be formed statewide and granted greater authority to make revenue sharing, land-use, and certain collective bargaining decisions.

In addition to the property tax reform initiatives listed above, the Blue Ribbon Commission is also recommending an initiative that will help foster regional cooperation and policymaking.

There are Councils of Governments (COGs) already established in some parts of Connecticut and other regional planning agencies throughout the State. If strengthened and expanded statewide, COGs could play a critical sub-state role in encouraging regional cooperation while honoring Connecticut's tradition of local control.

Provide incentives for the formation of strengthened COG-like structures by reserving new powers, including state revenue sharing, to these new entities. These strengthened COG-like structures could make headway on a whole host of regional issues, such as land-use planning, housing and redevelopment efforts, teacher collective bargaining [see recommendation 2(a) on previous page], joint service delivery, investment in regional priorities and the protection of farmland and other open space.

By modifying and strengthening existing regional entities and emphasizing consensus building, it is possible for Connecticut to preserve its essential character, improve its economic prospects and address its difficult problems of concentrated poverty and racial segregation.

The commission recommends that Councils of Government (COGs) be authorized to (a) share state revenues [e.g. a portion of the state sales tax], (b) share local property taxes [pursuant to existing law -- CGS 7-148bb], (c) bond for capital projects, in order to support coordinated economic development strategies, regional assets, and other projects, (d) make certain land-use decisions on a regional basis, (e) facilitate joint service delivery [pursuant to existing law -- CGS 7-148cc], (f) negotiate master teacher contracts [see recommendation 2(a) on previous page], (g) receive stronger financial and other incentives for municipalities to consolidate and/or cooperate on a multi-municipal or regional basis and to find areas of cooperation with state government (i.e. the consolidation of state and local road maintenance facilities and operations). (h) help municipalities consolidate the many special taxing and other districts to increase efficiency and accountability, and (i) help towns and cities better use the resources of municipal workers and teachers in fashioning more efficient and effective ways to deliver public services.

The aforementioned recommendations will increase the ability of state and local government to increase efficiency up, down, and across the public service delivery spectrum.