

Appropriations Committee Public Hearing
March 27, 2009 – HB 6363 Resident Trooper Program
Barbara Henry, First Selectman, Town of Roxbury

Good morning Senator Harp, Rep. Geragosian, and members of the Committee, my name is Barbara Henry and I am First Selectman of the Town of Roxbury as well as Vice President of COST – the CT Council of Small Towns. Thank you for the opportunity to speak here today.

In both of those capacities, I am here to speak in strong opposition to HB 6363 which would, among other things, implement the Governor's budget recommendation which proposes higher local costs for the Resident State Trooper program to 85% of the cost of a trooper in FY 09-10 and 100% of the cost in FY 10-11 and thereafter.

Roxbury has a population of less than 2,400 people. We are so small you can't buy a pound of hamburger meat in town – you must cross town lines to purchase it. I mention that only to emphasize that, like so many other small towns, we are predominantly a residential tax base.

My comments about the RTP are not directed towards any Trooper but the program itself.

When you transfer the State's financial crisis to the local level, the tax shift is one that we already overburdened property taxpayers can't handle. If we didn't have to shoulder many unfunded mandates of the past, we might be able to. It's just shifting the cost of the program from one budget to another budget. And there is only one thing left to do if it falls in the municipal budget and that is for us to say, "No."

The cost for salary and overhead for one Resident Trooper in our town is \$142,262. That's more than double my salary and overhead, and I work an average of 60 hours a week. Seventy (70%) of the \$142,262 equals \$99,584 that we pay. With the proposed increase to 85% that will expand to \$120,923, a \$21,339 increase – and that's without overtime figured in. I don't get paid overtime, do you?

When I look at all the operating lines in my proposed budget, which the Selectmen have worked very hard to see either decrease, stay level or incur a small increase, the line for State Police jumps out with a whopping 23% increase. In two years that will be a minimum of a 43% increase and that's not figuring any contractual increases or overtime. It also doesn't cover the computer we purchased so the NexGen program can run in the office, cell phone, electric, heat, office, space & supplies or internet service. I'm afraid to add those figures in.

What is particularly hard about this is the Troopers are getting contractual salary increases and have a stipend for "housing" included in this cost a.k.a. Resident Trooper stipend of \$100/month. The teachers are getting salary increases, too. In our town, no employee is getting a salary increase and, in fact, after discussions with our Public Works department, which is union, they have agreed to forgo their contractual salary increases 3% this year because they see that some other town employees have already had their hours cut in addition to no salary increase. I commend them for this. That's what small towns are really all about.

So with the town pulling back in other areas, this proposal is moving the Resident Trooper Program in our town closer to the chopping block. We have been a Resident Trooper town for many years, even before my time. It's not something I would be in favor of doing, but I've already had to make some tough decisions. This will become a public safety issue that I am very concerned about, and it will shift the entire cost of the trooper back to the State, which you should be very concerned about. And, in reality, our trooper will probably still patrol our town, through the troop, funded 100% by the State.

Phasing out state aid for the RST Program is not a good idea. This is an invaluable public safety asset which already costs us a small fortune at the present 70%. And I'll note that even with paying 70% of the cost, there is limited real authority over the trooper. While this program is a perk for the towns, it is also a perk for the State and goes a long way towards being a benefit for the person in the job.

As I understand it, if we lose our Resident Trooper, by law we also lose our town constable. And since we only have one of each at the moment, we don't want to lose them. As is stands now, if we decide to keep the program, there will be no extra money budgeted for overtime. Over the years we have endeavored to provide additional funds for overtime because this is what our residents wanted – more exposure, more traffic control and more enforcement by the Resident Trooper.

On the subject of overtime, perhaps there should be a change in what is allowed as far as exchanging a day scheduled to work for the town for a day working overtime through the troop. Possible cost savings could be realized there if it were looked into. I may be wrong on that but it should be looked into.

I've inquired about the opportunity of sharing a Resident Trooper with a surrounding small town, namely Bridgewater, and I was told that has not been done and can't be looked into until there is a budget. That's a shame and I think it should be looked into for the benefit of the very small towns or those towns who currently have a local police force.

If the State wants to do something to save money, perhaps business as usual should be looked into. I haven't heard of any cutbacks in hours or jobs of state employees. Like the municipal governments and private sector, the State needs to feel the pinch, too, in this area. It's difficult to rationalize the burden of the economic effect being largely felt by just the private sector. Our Building Department revenue, for example, is down nearly

80% this year. We cannot honestly justify keeping employee's hours at previous year's levels and, so, adjustments have been made to preserve the two jobs that run the department by reducing work hours. We're not talking layers of bureaucracy here.

The RST program has been an important program in many of the member COST towns. We have come to depend on it. I can tell you, though, that several will have no choice but to do without the program in the future if this proposal goes through. We know that we will still be served by the Troop and we also know that the response times will not be as good as they are now. Clearly, this proposal will directly jeopardize the public safety of our citizens and businesses.

Therefore, I implore you to vote against this proposal and keep the Resident Trooper program funded at present levels. The small towns need the program and the State needs the money.

Thank you.