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Testimony of Maurice Y. Bisson
First Selectman, Town of Hampton
HB 6493, Act Concerning Regional School Districts
February 23, 2009

Good afternoon Chairmen Gaffey and Fleischmann, Ranking Members Caligiuri and Giuliano, and Members of the Education Committee;

I am Maurice Bisson, First Selectman of the Town of Hampton. I am here today to express my opposition to HB 6493, Act Concerning Regional School Districts. The proposed legislation would change the method of counting votes for referenda determining dissolution of regional school districts in regions with fewer than 6000 people. The proposal would change the requirement that a majority of voters in each town approve the dissolution to a requirement for a simple majority of voters in the total population of the member towns.

I disagree with this change for several reasons. The first is that it appears to be targeted at Regional District 11, of which Hampton is a member. We are the smallest region by population and we happen to be involved in the study phase of the dissolution process. Legislation that affects the entire state should never be targeted at a specific region. However, it appears that is what is happening in this case.

We began the dissolution process understanding the procedures that would be followed. To change the procedures in the middle of the process is bad form. It appears that some are afraid that their position will not prevail, so they are trying to make an end run around the rules. If this were not the case, there would be no need to make the change. The process should continue to be conducted according to the rules in place at its initiation.

There are some who believe that to keep the process the way it is now is to allow one town to hold another hostage by voting down a withdrawal. However, if one town leaves a district, the remaining towns are responsible to pay the departing town for their share of all of the assets of the district. That would mean a payment in the millions would become the responsibility of the towns left behind. This payment would be a burden, and voters should not be expected to vote to impose such a burden on themselves. In the case of a dissolution, all towns would have the burden of disposing of the assets of the regional district.

Lately, I have attended several workshops that encourage towns to regionalize services. In Region 11 we have the beginning of regionalization. We need to encourage the towns to work together to solve problems and improve the district. If we make it easier for regions to dissolve than to work together we lose an opportunity to run our district more efficiently as is being recommended to towns across the state.

In summary, I encourage you to defeat this proposed legislation and leave the dissolution and withdrawal process as it currently stands. Thank you.