



Ralph Eno

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Connecticut Council of Small Towns (COST)

Testimony before the Government Administration & Elections

Committee

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• **HB-6696, AN ACT CONCERNING MUNICIPAL ETHICS**

Good morning Senator Slosberg, Representative Spallone, members of the Committee. Thank you for this opportunity to appear before you today. My name is Ralph Eno. I am First Selectman in the Town of Lyme as well as a member of the Connecticut Council of Small Towns (COST) Board of Directors.

My remarks this morning reflect COST's position on **HB-6696**, which would require all municipalities to adopt a code of ethical conduct by October 1, 2010 for its public officials, public employees and paid consultants.

COST opposes this bill. First, and most important, the matter of whether a municipality should establish such a code and create an oversight commission to enforce it is, or ought to be, the exclusive province of the electors and taxpayers in our respective communities.

Second, as your own TASK FORCE ON MUNICIPAL ETHICS acknowledges, this legislation represents an unfunded mandate of some as yet to be determined scale. If the Office of Fiscal Analysis has reviewed the bill for its potential impact, COST is not aware of any details. It will have fiscal implications for every city and town in the state. There will be more significant costs for those starting from square one, but since the legislation also requires compliance on the part of municipalities with pre-existing codes and commissions, there is the strong probability that they will be subjected to the cost of legal reviews. We keep hearing from our legislators about the need to stop passing along new, unfunded mandates to our cities and towns and yet, paradoxically, we are here having this discussion today despite the troubled economic times we are all enduring.

Finally, there is no way to sugarcoat this and I apologize if this seems somewhat harsh, but given the well publicized ethical lapses by some members of the Executive, Legislative and Judicial branches of our state government over the past several years, it is hard to fathom how the State of Connecticut could assume it has the moral high ground in this discussion. At this juncture, you have not earned the right to tell my town or any other without an ethics code or commission that it must allocate property tax dollars to create one. You cannot legislate ethical behavior, a fact that has been clearly evidenced at both the state and municipal level where the existence of strong ethics codes has not deterred unethical behavior on the part of public officials.

Please respect our ability to deal with these matters at the local level where decisions of this nature are most appropriately made and taxpayer interests are best served. We therefore urge your rejection of HB-6696.

Again, I thank you for your time and consideration and would be happy to try to answer any questions you may have.