



**Bart Russell, Executive Director
Connecticut Council of Small Towns
Testimony Before the Labor Committee
February 26, 2009**

The Connecticut Council of Small Towns (COST) opposes **HB-6194, AN ACT CONCERNING ADDITIONAL WORKERS' COMPENSATION PRESUMPTIONS FOR FIREFIGHTERS, POLICE OFFICERS AND EMERGENCY RESCUE WORKERS**, which adds additional workers' compensation presumptions for firefighters, police officers and emergency rescue workers at considerable cost to Connecticut's towns and cities.

Although COST members have a tremendous respect for our firefighters and public safety officers, this bill places an unsustainable financial burden on towns and their taxpayers. Under this bill, public safety personnel would receive special presumptions on top of already reasonable workers' compensation benefits. These special workers' compensation benefits would allow individuals to collect benefits without demonstrating a causal connection between the illness and the job. Instead, the bill shifts the burden to towns to prove the illnesses are not, in fact, job-related. This rebuttable presumption ignores long-standing public policy that requires demonstration of a causal connection between the job and the particular incident triggering the injury or illness – a fundamental tenant of our workers' compensation system.

Connecticut's small towns simply cannot afford to step into the financial black hole that this bill creates. The bill places the burden squarely on the backs of towns to prove that an illness is not job-related. If this burden is not met, the town's workers' compensation must cover the claim, which will lead to runaway workers' compensation costs and, ultimately, higher property taxes.

In the last several years, more and more town budgets have been rejected by taxpayers fed up with property tax increases. Now, towns are facing double digit increases in health insurance costs, energy costs and road repair costs. To pare down budgets to gain voter approval, many small towns have had to cut critical programs, including beneficial educational and athletic programs, library services, and needed road repairs. Others have had to cut back on key staff, including teachers and public safety personnel. Given this reality, lawmakers should reject this bill.

Towns are facing additional pressure associated with significant increases in costs for critical services and programs, including education, road construction and repair, building construction and public safety services. Local budgets have been straining from the enormous weight of these and other costs, as is evidenced by the increasing and historically high number of multiple referenda towns went through last year. We expect this situation will only get worse. Thank you for the opportunity to testify. Please contact me at 860-676-0770 if you have any questions.