



**Testimony of the Connecticut Council of Small Towns
Presented to Planning & Development Committee
of the Connecticut General Assembly**

February 23, 2009

- **H.B. No. 5537 AN ACT CONCERNING APPROVAL OF UNFUNDED STATE MANDATES**
- **H.B. No. 5550 AN ACT PROVIDING FOR A STATUTORY CAP ON UNFUNDED MANDATES**
- **H.B. No. 5558 AN ACT CONCERNING THE PROCESS OF LEGISLATIVE APPROVAL OF STATE MANDATES**
- **H.B. No. 5565 AN ACT CONCERNING UNFUNDED STATE MANDATES FOR MUNICIPALITIES**
- **H.B. No. 5869 AN ACT CONCERNING THE APPROVAL PROCESS FOR UNFUNDED STATE MANDATES**
- **H.B. No. 5529 AN ACT CONCERNING THE FUNDING OF MANDATES ON TOWNS**

The Connecticut Council of Small Towns (COST) *strongly supports* the above-referenced bills, which will create a more transparent process for voting on unfunded mandates by requiring a 2/3 vote of the General Assembly in order to adopt an unfunded mandate. A 2/3 approval requirement will highlight the cost of the proposed mandate to Connecticut's towns and cities and give lawmakers the opportunity to carefully weigh the fiscal impact before passing on another unfunded mandate to Connecticut taxpayers. A partnership must exist between each level of government and fiscal impact discussions must take place before mandate legislation is passed.

This bill will result in greater sensitivity and accountability by the State to the impact of unfunded mandates on our communities' ability to meet our local needs for education, public safety and public health. If, however, the state determines that it is a significant priority, the bill will allow adoption by a 2/3 vote.

Unfunded mandates continue to drive up local costs beyond the control of our small towns and cities. Municipalities are experiencing staggering financial difficulties because of their over reliance on property taxes to pay for essential public services. Given current limited levels of state aid, towns cannot afford new unfunded mandates. COST therefore strongly supports the statutory prohibition against unfunded state mandates on municipalities unless there is a 2/3 vote of the General Assembly.

We also urge lawmakers to reinstate a provision of Section 2-32c, C.G.S., repealed in 1997, which required legislative committees to hold public hearings on mandates referred to them by the Connecticut Advisory Commission on Intergovernmental Relations and advise leaders as to whether the mandates should be approved, rejected or modified. Too often, the real fiscal impact of a mandate is unclear until legislation is passed and towns are faced with compliance costs. Reinstating this provision would provide an important oversight mechanism which would shine a light on unfunded mandates and provide an opportunity for careful consideration regarding whether the mandate should be approved, rejected or modified.