

**Town of Chester**  
203 Middlesex Avenue  
Chester, CT 06412



telephone: 860-526-0013  
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**BILL:** 6388

**TITLE:** AN ACT PROVIDING MANDATE RELIEF TO MUNICIPALITIES

**POSITION:** Support

Unfunded mandates place excessive financial burden on the residents of each of the 169 municipalities that make up Connecticut. The impact of such mandates can vary widely from municipality to municipality, whether in direct cost or incremental labor costs that may be more difficult to identify. The so called "benefit" that the unfunded mandate addresses varies greatly as well, depending on the population, service needs, and relevance to the community.

#### **MANDATED POSTING OF MINUTES AND AGENDAS ON WEBSITES**

For years Chester has relied on the generous donation of time and effort on the part of town volunteers to develop and manage our town website. In order to meet the mandated requirements imposed on 10.1.08 we had to spend \$1,200 to develop a patch and provide training to our Town Clerk allowing her to post the material in a timely and accurate manner. Even with this effort we have had issues arising out of this mandate. On a very basic matter, the inclusion of letters presented at a board meeting, the letters were included with the hard copies posted by the Town Clerk, but were not converted to electronic format and posted with the electronic copies of the minutes on the web site. This may seem like a minor matter but, given the new requirements we were out of compliance and subject to FOI action. With limited staff and limited expertise minor matters become major.

I compare this issue to the recent changeover in voting machines. While our lever voting machines worked flawlessly for decades, the state felt that new technology provided a better system (and paid for much of the implementation). If the legislature feels that the website is an improvement in the dispensation of public information then they should provide a stipend that will allow for its appropriate implementation.

#### **BINDING ARBITRATION**

I support the proposed changes as presented in their entirety. This is perhaps the single most important issue before the legislature. The increased financial burden inflicted, without corresponding value of service is promoted more by the current stipulations of binding arbitration than any other mandate in place. The proposed adjustments to the legislation levels the playing field, providing a better opportunity that all interests of the community are represented.

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## **MANDATED STORAGE OF EVICTED TENANTS PROPERTY**

The mandated requirement that municipalities store the personal effects of evicted tenants places an undue burden on municipal public works staff as well as the taxpaying community. Small towns such as Chester have very limited resources with which to work. The requirement to store the effects of evicted tenants has caused our community hardship in several ways:

- We have been notified of pending evictions and scheduled appropriately, only to have the eviction postponed. With only 3 town crew employees this has created scheduling difficulties.
- Chester has very limited storage space. There is the potential for unsafe working conditions to develop as a result of storing belongings in town facilities or creates an undue financial burden on the town if rental storage is needed.
- Unsafe working conditions have presented themselves as town employees have arrived at an eviction site to find very unsanitary conditions that must be accounted for and handled properly.

The cost of such evictions should be considered part of the risk of doing business when an individual or organization engages in rental property management. To expect that such services should be provided at taxpayer expense is unwarranted.

Therefore I support the passage of the most appropriate bill eliminating the requirement of towns to store the personal effects of evicted tenants.

## **POSTING OF PUBLIC NOTICES ON TOWN WEBSITES**

Web posting of public notices would provide for wider access, as there are more internet connected homes in any community than there are subscribers to any one publication. In addition the posting would remain for the entire posting period rather than the usual one day. Chester spends about \$4,500 per year in such postings.

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## **IN-SCHOOL SUSPENSION**

The intention of the legislation regarding in-school suspension is meritorious, however, locally elected boards of education should maintain the right to set the policy deemed most appropriate for their community.

As is commonly understood the 169 towns that make up Connecticut are unique in countless ways. The impact of legislation such as this will have significantly varying impact, depending on school and staff population, as well as demonstrated student need. This will limit local boards of education and the administrators they hire in prioritizing curriculum and staffing positions as they are forced to fund mandates that may not coincide with the demonstrated desires of the community, or needs of the student population. There is no action without reaction. The requirement to fund this mandate will undoubtedly result in less funding being available elsewhere. Mandates such as this serve to erode the influence and accountability of locally elected boards of education.

Imposing a three year moratorium on new unfunded mandates would allow for clear, focused attention on addressing the growing budget deficit and prevent the temptation of mandate creation to creep back into the legislative minds after the current urgency passes. We are at the breaking point. New unfunded mandates will put municipalities over the edge.

Thomas E. Marsh  
First Selectman, Chester