

Capitol Region Council of Governments

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DATE: FEBRUARY 23, 2009

TO: CHAIRMEN AND MEMBERS OF THE PLANNING AND DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE

FROM: MELODY CURREY, CHAIRMAN, CRCOG POLICY BOARD
LYLE D. WRAY, PHD, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

SUBJECT: CONCERN REGARDING GOVERNOR'S BILL NO. 6389, AN ACT PROMOTING REGIONALIZATION

The Capitol Region Council of Governments (CRCOG) is a regional planning organization representing the City of Hartford and the 28 surrounding communities. Our members have collaborated for more than 30 years on a wide range of projects to benefit our towns individually and the region as a whole. One of the many areas we dedicate ourselves to is helping members improve governmental efficiency and save tax dollars through regional shared services and other direct service initiatives.

The local government fiscal crisis we find ourselves in will not go away. Without significant changes to the way local governments provide services, programs will be cut, professionalism and morale within local governments will suffer, and citizens will pay higher property taxes. CRCOG is committed to facilitating regional service sharing, but recognizes the need for funding the existing Regional Performance Incentive Grant Program to get the most promising projects implemented. We also strongly assert that intermunicipal coordination by a Regional Planning Organization like CRCOG can facilitate decision-making and provide technical assistance that is not just necessary, but vital to the success of these projects. The regionalization incentive grant program created through this bill removes RPOs from this important coordination role. Rather than establish a new program, the state should be focusing its energy on and providing this \$50 million in funding to the Regional Performance Incentive Grant Program that already exists.

CRCOG is already encouraging, coordinating, and facilitating many regional shared services in our area of operation with the support of member dues contributions and State Grant in Aid (SGIA). The SGIA, which allows CRCOG to continue our work in cooperative purchasing, municipal services, and fulfilling legislative mandates concerning regional land use planning, was eliminated in the Governor's budget proposal. The State Grant in Aid for Regional Planning was funded last year at \$1,000,000 statewide, then cut to \$950,000 in July 2008. The CRCOG share of this grant is \$128,000.

Here are a few of the regional shared service initiatives which we are currently undertaking with the financial support of the State Grant in Aid, local dues, and Regional Performance Incentive Grant Program.

- Having core, SGIA-funded staff available allowed us to apply for, receive and successfully administer nearly \$5.2 million in OPM Regional Performance Incentive Grants. CRCOG and its towns are now carrying out 10 projects including the shared development of information technology applications, cooperative maintenance of the Farmington Valley Trail System, shared development and implementation of an information technology system to support regional and local health district operations, and four public safety initiatives, including establishment of a Regional Emergency Operations Center.
- CRCOG local assessments and the SGIA continue to support the 40 year old Capitol Region Purchasing Council (CRPC) program, which saved its 73 member towns in FY 2008 almost \$2 million, and \$1.5 million in the prior year. The Council conducts 18 to 20 bids annually for a variety of goods and services, and saves its members money through conducting competitive bids on their behalf and providing access to volume-based savings. The Council also runs a Natural Gas Procurement Program that serves 33 municipalities. Two new initiatives that are being developed now, and which will be up and running by the end of the calendar year, are a Job Order Contracting Program and a cooperative purchasing Electricity Consortium.

We are pleased that this bill recognizes the importance of regional cooperation in the provision of essential municipal services, and has proposed funding to support such efforts. However, based on our experience with the Regional Incentive Grant Program and our long-standing Capitol Region Purchasing Council, you still need one entity to coordinate and shepherd these efforts. As budgets and staffing tighten at the municipal level, Capitol Region towns are increasingly looking to CRCOG to be that coordinator and facilitator. The proposed regionalization incentive grant program does not enable the State's existing regional coordination structure—the regional planning organizations—to play a role in implementing new regional service sharing initiatives. In addition, the Governor's proposed elimination of the State Grant in Aid for Regional Planning further impedes our ability to develop new ideas and initiatives that can help local governments function more efficiently and cost-effectively.

In an era where towns are going to need to cooperate, coordinate, and consider regional shared or consolidated services in order to deal with our fiscal crisis, CRCOG is a vital mechanism for advocating for and supporting our towns as a group. We have provided attachments with more detail regarding the programmatic work of the Capitol Region Council of Governments and hope it will help you understand the extensive impact we have on the livelihood of municipalities.