



## TESTIMONY

of the

## CONNECTICUT CONFERENCE OF MUNICIPALITIES

to the

## PLANNING & DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE

March 6, 2009

CCM is Connecticut's statewide association of towns and cities and the voice of local governments - your partners in governing Connecticut. Our members represent over 93% of Connecticut's population.

We appreciate the opportunity to testify on the following bill of interest to towns and cities:

### **H. B. 6587, "An Act Concerning Municipal Ombudsmen"**

CCM supports this bill.

H.B. 6587 would assign a "municipal ombudsman" in each of the Department of Environmental Protection (DEP), Department of Transportation (DOT), and the Department of Economic and Community Development (DECD) -- state agencies that interact regularly and directly with local governments -- to improve coordination for economic development, planning, transportation, etc.

This bill would increase efficiency in economic development. Importantly, the designation of an existing employee would avoid the need to add staff to perform this function -- H.B. 6587 would not cost the State a dime.

Municipal officials frequently state that they cannot easily navigate the state permit-approval process. They tell tales of economic development opportunities lost because permits have gone into the dark hole of one state agency or another, never to re-appear. An ombudsman would improve coordination between state and local governments -- partners in government -- when it comes to economic development and regulatory compliance.

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The ombudsman would provide municipalities with information regarding “program requirements” and “permits and other approvals.”

This proposal is an important component of enhancing the state-local partnership.

By designating a person, Commissioners are appointing existing staff. Currently, when a municipal official calls a state agency, existing staff handle the inquiry. This bill would just help ensure that towns and cities are not sent to a hodgepodge of state employees.

Many grants are funded through and many permits are required from DEP, DOT and DECD. It is reasonable and proper that municipal chief executive officials have the ability to communicate with a key person on state-local issues and concerns.

Further, the proposal allows key state staff to become more familiar and in-tune with municipal issues and concerns. This has to be positive overall.

State legislators have a state agency person with whom they can confer and receive answers to questions. As entities that are required to submit important health and safety information to the State, as well as receive significant amounts of money that hugely impact community development, it is appropriate that state agencies appoint staff to serve as municipal ombudsmen.

*CCM urges the Committee to favorably report this bill.*

Thank you.

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For more information, please contact Ron Thomas or Gian-Carl Casa of CCM at (203) 498-3000.