



**Testimony of the Connecticut Council of Small Towns
Presented to Planning & Development Committee
of the Connecticut General Assembly
February 23, 2009**

Re: S.B. No. 394 AN ACT CONCERNING STATE MANDATE RELIEF

The Connecticut Council of Small Towns (COST) *strongly supports* SB-394, which would provide property tax relief by eliminating or suspending burdensome unfunded municipal mandates, including, the requirement that towns post meeting minutes and agendas on town websites; the in-school suspension requirement. It also imposes a three-year moratorium on any new unfunded mandates.

Repeal of FOI Website Posting Law

Although we recognize that the law requiring towns to post minutes and agendas on town websites is well-intentioned, it has imposed some burdens on small towns that have proven difficult in this economic climate.

Small towns rely heavily on volunteers to record minutes of meetings, type those minutes and send them to a municipal employee for posting the information on the town's web site, many of which lack the staff to constantly update their websites. In many small towns, volunteers also maintain the web sites. Asking the volunteers to type up the minutes of a meeting, which are often taken in longhand, and to then also put the minutes online, all within seven days, is too much to ask. Rather than risk being penalized for not complying with state law, Harwinton shut down its site to give us the opportunity to put the mechanisms in place needed to comply with the law.

Unfortunately, the law is very unclear as to what would be considered a violation of the law. If the person responsible for posting documents to the website is unavailable or the website itself is down due to technical difficulties, is the town in violation of the law? These questions could not be sufficiently answered and towns are uncertain as to whether they have the resources to comply with the law.

We therefore support efforts to repeal this law to give towns some relief from unfunded mandates that, combined with shrinking revenues and increased costs, are placing a crushing burden on Connecticut's towns and cities.

In-School Suspension

Although well intentioned, the mandate requiring towns to use in-school suspension to discipline students for all but the most egregious violations imposes a costly burden on small towns, which must make space available and hire additional staff to monitor students in in-school suspension. At a time when towns are bracing themselves for additional cuts in state education aid, it makes sense to repeal this costly mandate.

Moratorium on Unfunded Mandates

Unfunded mandates continue to drive up local costs beyond the control of our small towns and cities. In this uncertain economy, municipalities are experiencing staggering financial difficulties. Any additional unfunded mandates imposed by the state, however well-intentioned, will force increases in property taxes and cuts to other local services and programs. A three-year mandate moratorium would provide towns and cities with some breathing room to prepare and budget for the difficult road ahead.