

Town of Chester
203 Middlesex Avenue
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BILL: SB 394

TITLE: AN ACT CONCERNING STATE MANDATE RELIEF

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.

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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.

THREE YEAR MORATORIUM

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