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DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH

February 4, 2009

Senator Jonathan Harris, Co-Chairman,
Representative Elizabeth Ritter, Co-Chairman
Public Health Committee
Room 3000, Legislative Office Building
Hartford, CT 06106

Regarding: Testimony on Raised Bill No.6262- An Act Regarding Regional Action Councils

Dear Senator Harris, Representative Ritter and distinguished members of the Public Health Committee:

I have specific interest in sharing my perspective and expertise on this topic for several reasons :

- I have been the Community Health Planner for the Greenwich Department of Health/Town of Greenwich since 2000;
- I have served as the Chairperson of the Lower Fairfield County Regional Action Council (LFCRAC) since April 2005 when this Council was initiated;
- I am currently serving as a Commissioner on the Commission on Health Equity, although I am not representing them, nor am I speaking on their behalf on this issue

Raised Bill No. 6262 would have the impact of restructuring the infrastructure and underpinnings of the State's Regional Action Councils (RAC's) in some very significant and detrimental ways. In the case of LFCRAC, this bill would increase our area from the four towns of Greenwich, Stamford, Darien and New Canaan, with a combined population of 220,000 to a vastly larger span that would stretch from Bridgeport down to Greenwich.

The RACs were designed to be grassroots collaboratives that would become actively engaged with partners in their local communities to address gaps in substance abuse in prevention and treatment. To do this, RAC Directors and members build relationships with local leaders in many community sectors, facilitate community education, provide technical assistance to local coalitions and other groups, convene task forces and working groups and engage in many workforce capacity building endeavors.

The greatest strength of the Lower Fairfield County Regional Action Council is that the council is so well known to so many groups including health facilities, service providers, consumers of mental health and addiction services, physicians, faith-based groups, merchants, immigrant groups, and so many others. The Director of LFCRAC has built collaborations by bringing together local people with similar missions or issues resulting partnerships for multi-town projects that has included the benefit of cost and resource sharing. Redistricting of the RACs would make it impossible to sustain and build the relationships that currently exist and that have been instrumental in building these regional collaborations.

Changing the structure of the RACs would also have significant negative revenue impact because grant funds generated by them would be lost if redistricting were to occur.

Currently, 10 of the 14 RAC's are Drug Free Communities, including LFCRAC. This is a 5-year grant renewable for up to 10 years. LFCRAC is currently in its fourth year but this grant will be lost if RACs are redistricted. The DFC project monitor has expressed its strong support of our present initiatives supported by this grant such as training of physicians with the intent of getting screening for ATOD in primary care, Lock Your Meds regional campaign. ATOD presentations in Spanish and development of faith-based prevention initiatives. Since its inception in April 2005, LFCRAC has generated an additional approximately \$450,000 in federal and state grants for our region. These monies have been used for a variety of capacity building initiatives some of which have been duplicated in other communities. LFCRAC has also generated many in-kind donations based on its ability to identify and articulate regional needs.

In conclusion, expanding the present LFCRAC region would dilute or eliminate the efforts to support local prevention efforts and continue to build the dynamic and unique regional collaborations needed to address substance abuse prevention and treatment gaps in our region. I hope that you will agree that the purpose and mission of the Regional Action Councils is best served and supported under its current structure.

Sincerely yours,

Stephanie R. Paulmeno

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