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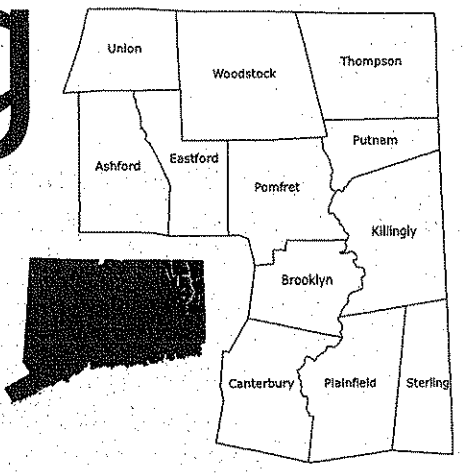

February 6, 2009

Testimony Regarding

Raised Bill 6262
An Act Concerning Regional Action Councils

made before the

Public Health Committee

The Northeastern Connecticut Council of Governments (NECCOG) represents the chief-elected officials of 12 northeastern Connecticut towns. We have reviewed the purpose **House Bill 6262, An Act Concerning Regional Action Councils** and **urge you this committee to not give it favorable consideration.**

Consolidation of the Regional Action Councils to five is a step backward and will, in our view work contrary to the mission for which the RAC's were established. In our region we have the Northeast Communities Against Substance Abuse (NECASA) -- for more than eighteen years they have been a partner with our communities in the ongoing work to battle substance abuse. NECASA has provided not only technical assistance to our towns, schools, communities and organizations, it has brought needed financial resources to our community to prevent substance abuse and has coordinated and enhanced our regions' response to the issue.

The key word is "community" – NECASA and the other RAC's are community organizations. Addressing substance abuse is best done at this level – the studies and RESULTS back this up. A 41 town region, as is proposed by HB 6262 for eastern Connecticut removes community from the RAC and will not, we believe improve results – if anything it will move us backward. Going backward at any time is not good – especially with the economy being what it is we need these programs. Currently, in northeastern Connecticut the communities served by NECASA have a certain commonality that makes sense in terms of issues and demographics – the move to 41 towns changes this dynamic. NECASA and the RAC's bring key constituency groups together including government leaders, mental health and substance abuse treatment professionals, law enforcement, social service providers, school personnel, parents, civic groups, faith organizations, youth and others -- their

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track record is solid. The five district approach proposed by HB 6262 will, in our view, dilute not enhance this work.

Additionally, NECASA has helped our region secure grants (Substance Abuse Mental Health Service Administration's (SAMHSA) Mentoring, Drug-Free Communities and STOP Act Programs; the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, The United Way, and local community foundations and other contributions.) that have enhanced efforts to combat substance abuse. NECASA has used its state funds to leverage $1,307,170 in additional funds since 2005. **From 2005-2009 RACs together brought in over 18 million dollars in Federal and local contributions to communities to enhance substance abuse prevention efforts.** If HB 6262 is passed, we are told that due to federal funding rules, many of these funds would be lost.

House Bill 6262 is a step backward from an effort that demonstrates success every day. It is a community effort - not extravagant in its cost – but cost effective in its results. Consolidation, as proposed in HB 6262, places its success at risk. In the end, it is not about the RAC's or in our region NECASA – it is about the people served and the lives saved.

Thank you for your consideration of our position.

Please do not hesitate to contact us (John Filchak, Executive Director) should you have any questions or would like additional information.