



**Testimony of Barbara Henry
First Selectman, Town of Roxbury
On Behalf of the Connecticut Council of Small Towns
Before the Appropriations Committee
Of the Connecticut General Assembly
March 27, 2009**

Good morning Senator Harp, Representative Geragosian, members of the Committee, my name is Barbara Henry and I am the First Selectman of the Town of Roxbury. I am also an Officer on the Executive Committee of the Connecticut Council of Small Towns' Board of Directors.

The Connecticut Council of Small Towns (COST) strongly opposes **HB-6363, AN ACT IMPLEMENTING THE GOVERNOR'S BUDGET RECOMMENDATIONS CONCERNING GENERAL GOVERNMENT, CONSERVATION, DEVELOPMENT, REGULATION, PROTECTION, JUDICIAL AND CORRECTIONS**, which will significantly reduce funding for the Resident State Trooper Program.

HB-6363 shifts the full financial responsibility of resident state trooper costs to the town that employs them. Under current law, the state pays 30% of the cost of a resident trooper. Under the proposed bill, the towns will be required to pay 85% of the costs the first fiscal year and all of costs in the second year. Significantly reducing funding for the resident state trooper program would force many of our small towns to eliminate the resident state trooper program, cut back on overtime or reduce the number of troopers, putting the public's safety at risk.

Small towns simply cannot afford a police department of their own and under this proposed budget bill, they will not be able to afford a resident state trooper. We have already heard from many towns throughout Connecticut that they believe they will be forced to eliminate or severely reduce the resident state trooper program in order to balance their budgets. Clearly, this proposal will directly jeopardize the public safety of our citizens and businesses.

The resident state trooper program has been in place for over 60 years. Over the years, more and more small towns have chosen to utilize resident state troopers to provide greater public safety protection to their citizens. In fact, of the state's 1,200 troopers, 117

are resident troopers assigned to specific towns. Although the cost to communities has gone up to 70 percent, it has still been viewed as the best way for small communities to have a law enforcement presence.

Towns that do not have their own departments and choose not to hire a resident state trooper must rely on patrols from the nearest state trooper barracks, which could be miles away. There have been numerous situations where a trooper responding to a call for help from barracks miles away put citizens at risk. For example, ten years ago, a resident of the town of Chaplin, Heather Messenger, frantically called 911 to report she was being attacked by her estranged husband. Unfortunately, the nearest state trooper was 20 minutes away. Heather was dead by the time the trooper arrived.

In response to this incident, the state legislature increased state police staffing for coverage in smaller towns, from 1,160 state troopers to 1,248 state troopers and Chaplin and many other small towns hired resident state troopers. Since then, crime has gone up in our communities. Although town leaders recognize that public safety is essential, given the current economic climate and challenges facing towns as they craft their budgets, cutting state funding for the resident state trooper program will force towns to reduce the number of troopers, cut their overtime or eliminate the program entirely.

It is also important to point out that this proposal may actually *increase* state costs because if a town does not have a police force or resident state trooper, it relies on the state barracks to respond to public safety concerns. The salaries and benefits of the troopers in the barracks are funded entirely by the state.

COST urges lawmakers to retain the current program and resist efforts to balance the budget in ways that will not put the safety of our citizens at risk.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify. Please contact Bart Russell, Executive Director, COST at 860-676-0770 if you have any questions.