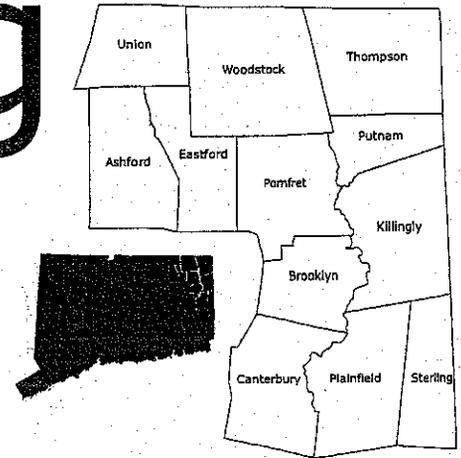


neccog

northeastern connecticut council of governments



Testimony Regarding

Senate Bill 888

An Act Concerning Regional Economic Development

made before the

Commerce Committee

February 19, 2009

The Northeastern Connecticut Council of Governments (NECCOG) is **opposed** to Senate Bill 888, An Act Concerning Regional Economic Development and respectfully asks that the Commerce Committee reject this proposal. Our primary reason for this opposition is not that we oppose regional economic development – we strongly endorse such regional efforts. Our opposition stems from the fact that we are already engaged in regional economic development with the Economic Development Administration. We view Senate Bill 888 as a step backward and not one in the best interest of NECCOG 12 town region or the larger region in which we participate for economic development.

Beginning in 1999 NECCOG sought to gain approval from the Economic Development Administration of a Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy or "CEDS." During this process we reached out to the Windham Region – now the Windham Region Council of Governments and four towns in the southeast which were part of our Eastern Connecticut Enterprise Corridor. The result was the **Northeast Economic Partnership**. The Northeast Economic Partnership consists of 22 towns and a range of public and private sector members in full accordance with EDA's requirements. In 2002 our CEDS was approved by EDA. In 2007 we completed our five-year CEDS update – a major milestone in the CEDS process. The following is from EDA's CEDS Guidelines:

A CEDS is required to qualify for Economic Development Administration (EDA) assistance under its public works, economic adjustment, and most planning programs, and is a prerequisite for designation by EDA as an economic development district (EDD). The CEDS must be the result of a continuing economic development planning process, developed with broad based and diverse community participation, and contain the following:

- An analysis of economic and community development problems and opportunities including incorporation of any relevant material or suggestions from other government sponsored or supported plans;*
- Background and history of the economic development situation of the area covered, with a discussion of the economy, including as appropriate, geography, population, labor force, resources, and the environment;*
- A discussion of community participation in the planning efforts;*
- A section setting forth goals and objectives for taking advantage of the opportunities and solving the economic development problems of the area serviced;*

- A plan of action, including suggested projects to implement objectives and goals set forth in the strategy; and
- Performance measures that will be used to evaluate whether and to what extent goals and objectives have been or are being met.

The CEDS analyzes local conditions, identifies problems and opportunities, defines the vision and goals of the community, designs the strategies to accomplish these goals, coordinates activities to implement these strategies, and evaluates and updates the process. ... A successful CEDS process should lead to the formulation and implementation of a program that creates higher-skill, higher-wage jobs; raises income levels; diversifies the economy; and improves the quality of life, while protecting the environment. The process should adopt a logical approach to long-range development while identifying and implementing short-term problem solutions to achieve early results and maintain momentum and public support. The CEDS document should be readily accessible to the economic development stakeholders in the community. There should be a continuing program of communication and outreach that encourages broad-based public engagement, participation, and commitment of partners. The general public, government decision makers, and business investors should be able to use it as a guide to understanding the regional economy and to taking action to improve it. The strategy should take into account and, where appropriate, incorporate other planning efforts in the community. Its quality should be judged by its usefulness as a tool for local decision making. Each CEDS is unique, reflecting the specific challenges and opportunities of its area. ... The community's vision and goals, together with an appraisal of the region's competitive advantage, should set the strategic direction for the action plan. The action plan should establish program priorities for implementation. Finally, the CEDS should establish criteria and performance measures for evaluation of the process and for the periodic update of the document.

(emphasis added)

We are not yet an EDA District because Connecticut has a policy of not endorsing such actions – which is a prerequisite for acceptance as a District. To date, the effort has resulted in \$1.5 million for the Town of Plainfield in EDA funds. District designation would enhance our planning process and opportunities to fund projects over a wider range of communities within our region.

While we agree that the state should encourage regional planning for economic development. Artificially dividing the state, as Senate Bill 888 would impose, into five regions for economic development is not necessarily a means to that end. We are ready to work with the committee to enhance regional economic planning and a stronger relationship with EDA.

Thank you for your consideration of our position. For additional information or comment, please contact John Filchak, NECCOG Executive Director.