



STATE OF CONNECTICUT
OFFICE OF THE
PROBATE COURT ADMINISTRATOR

PAUL J. KNIERIM, JUDGE
Probate Court Administrator

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To: Senate Co-Chair Andrew McDonald
House Co-Chair Michael Lawlor
Senate Ranking Member John Kissel
House Ranking Member Arthur O'Neill
Honorable Members of the Judiciary Committee

From: Paul J. Knierim, Judge
Probate Court Administrator

Re: HB 6007 An Act Concerning the Merger of the Probate Districts of
Southbury and Roxbury.

Date: March 9, 2009

The Office of the Probate Court Administrator supports this bill and urges the committee's favorable report.

Considering the budget crisis confronting both the probate system and the state as a whole, there can be no question that the number of probate courts must be reduced. This bill, which represents the agreement of the towns of Roxbury and Southbury that their now separate probate courts should be consolidated, can move us one step closer to a more efficient probate system.

This bill is also important in that the communities involved made the decision to merge their courts after considering factors that were pertinent to them. Because the two towns share a community of interests, a single court will maintain the close connection to the people that it serves. The consolidated court can be readily accommodated in existing facilities located in Southbury Town Hall, so no additional expense to acquire or improve space for the court will be required. Consolidation will serve to improve access to the probate court because the Southbury Probate Court is already open full-time and is convenient for residents of Roxbury.

Factors of this nature are relevant when considering any consolidation of probate courts. A consolidation implemented without prior analysis of the availability of suitable facilities, for example, could result in expenses that outweigh any savings from the merger. The Strategic Plan that the Probate Assembly and probate administration have jointly proposed seeks to facilitate discussion of these issues at the regional level by asking the legislature to establish regional probate planning committees charged with developing plans for voluntary court consolidation. These committees, which would have a November 15, 2009 deadline to complete their plans, would afford those with the most knowledge of local conditions to help shape the configuration of consolidated probate districts in their area. The Committee may wish to consider specific criteria, such as population or workload parameters, to ensure that the regional planning process yields satisfactory results.

Many other communities are currently engaged in discussions about possible voluntary mergers. Probate administration is fully supportive of those efforts and will continue to assist municipalities as the process continues through the session.