



TESTIMONY
OF THE
CONNECTICUT CONFERENCE OF MUNICIPALITIES
TO THE
LABOR AND PUBLIC EMPLOYEES COMMITTEE

February 26, 2009

Good afternoon, my name is Steve Werbner, Town Manager of Tolland and Chairman of the Connecticut Conference of Municipalities' (CCM) Municipal Labor Relations Committee. CCM is Connecticut's statewide association of towns and cities and the voice of local governments - your partners in governing Connecticut. Our members represent over 93% of Connecticut's population. I appreciate this opportunity to testify before this joint committee on an issue of concern to towns and cities.

Raised Bill 6194 "An Act Concerning Additional Workers' Compensation Presumptions for Firefighters, Police Officers, and Emergency Rescue Workers"

This bill would mandate special workers' compensation benefits to *all police officers, constables, firefighters, and emergency rescue workers – both paid and volunteers*. Specifically, Raised Bill 6194 would:

- (1) Mandate new workers' compensation benefits for the following cancers: multiple myeloma, non-Hodgkin's lymphoma, prostate, and testicular; and
- (2) Mandate new workers' compensation benefits for the following infectious and contagious diseases: hepatitis, meningitis, and tuberculosis.

The professions police officers, firefighters, and emergency rescue workers have chosen involves personal risk and courage. Local officials have long supported public safety employees and their just compensation when injuries occur on duty and as a result of their work. In fact, local officials negotiated – just last year – reasonable benefits for specific cardiac emergencies while on duty. **However, the special state-mandated presumptions for cancers and diseases proposed in Raised Bill 6194 are simply unreasonable and are not medically justified.**

CCM opposes Raised Bill 6194. This proposal defies common sense in recession-era lawmaking and completely ignores growing deficits, dwindling revenues and the entire economic crisis. As state lawmakers grapple with major budget issues – proposals such as Raised Bill 6194 that seek to mandate special benefits – via a 'no-proof necessary' law known as "a rebuttable presumption" – should ultimately be considered in the context of two fundamental questions:

Over -

1. *Is there a statewide public policy problem that demands action by the General Assembly — or are the needs of special interest groups at issue?*
2. *Can local residential and business property taxpayers afford the costs of this new state mandate in this economy?*

The answer to both questions is a resounding “NO”.

Setting the Medical Record Straight:

CANCERS

- **For no form of cancer is there a consensus among scientists that firefighting can be a causal factor.** It is true that the scientific research that bears on this issue has its limits: it is possible that a small increased risk of one or more forms of cancer truly is present but is below the level of detection of the studies that have been done. Nonetheless, the research to date makes it clear that if multiple myeloma (or non-Hodgkin’s lymphoma, or prostate or testicular cancer) were to develop in a given firefighter, it is highly likely that this cancer would have occurred no matter what that person’s occupation had been.

INFECTIOUS & CONTAGIOUS DISEASES

- **Research on the risks of infectious and contagious diseases is also not conclusive enough to warrant special, costly workers’ compensation presumptions.**
- The federal Centers for Disease Control (CDC) — the country’s leading disease research center — reported on five studies of hepatitis C infection. The article examined studies conducted in Philadelphia, Atlanta, Connecticut, Miami-Dade County, Florida, and Pittsburgh. The CDC concluded:
 - “**First responders are not at a greater risk than the general population for HCV [hepatitis C virus] infection ...**”
- Similarly, a study by the U.S. National Institute of Occupational Safety documented that neither for hepatitis C nor other blood-borne viral infections (such as HIV) are firefighters at increased risk

Separating the emotional element from the facts in this debate is difficult, yet essential, when charged with the daunting task of crafting legislation in this economic crisis. The real-world impacts of these proposed mandates would be devastating to municipal budgets and local property taxpayers. **Forcing towns to assume the costs of these illnesses for certain employees may be politically attractive, but it would not be responsible — or medically defensible — public policy.**

CCM urges you to **oppose Raised Bill 6194**, now – in committee – as an unnecessary and unaffordable state mandate on towns and cities. Your hometown needs budget solutions – not new unfunded state mandates.



If you have any questions, please call Bob Labanara or Ron Thomas of CCM, at (203) 498-3000