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Good afternoon, my name is Cephus Nolen, I am the Director of East Hartford Youth Service Bureau and the President of ERASE, the Regional Action Council that serves 15 Towns East of the Connecticut River.

I am here today to urge you to oppose *Raised Bill 6262 – An Act Concerning The Regional Action Councils*. **This proposed bill has the potential to put at risk two of ERASE's Federal grants**, Drug-Free Communities and the STOP Act to prevent underage drinking. The contracts for these grants indicate that only one fiduciary can be a recipient of each of these Federal grants. ERASE's Federal Project Officer has confirmed that there is no flexibility in this requirement. These 2 grants combined, in the past 2 years, have brought in \$250,000 in prevention funding to the ERASE Region. These 2 grants currently provide East Hartford's Local Prevention Council over \$6,600 per grant year to implement evidence-based prevention strategies to reduce underage drinking, marijuana and tobacco use. Something our local prevention councils would be unable to do without these resources. Additionally, these grants provide East Hartford and other participating towns, the opportunity to assess students' substance use rates through student surveys. Without these grants, our towns would not have the financial resources needed to implement surveys which are essential in gaining additional grant funds for youth and other social services needs.

The ERASE Board of Directors is gravely concerned about how merging ERASE with other RACs will impact the responsiveness to emerging issues and the ability to understand the culture and capacity of the communities the RAC serves. "Regionalization" of the Regional Action Councils has the potential to undo the many grassroots partnerships that have been established by ERASE and partner organizations over the past 18 years. ERASE's ability to influence change and provide assistance to its member towns is based on its long relationships, which would be difficult to maintain when regions may potentially represent over 40 towns, as this bill would require. In fact, these relationships are what enable ERASE to effectively fulfill the role of substance abuse planning that DMHAS has prescribed. ERASE is able to provide reports to DMHAS and plan regional efforts using evidence-based models because of its relationship with local contacts. These relationships enable ERASE staff to call community representatives with requests for data, in-person meetings and information and have a response within 24 hours.

Another example of a Regional effort that could be at stake with the passage of this bill is ERASE's PAWS-Peers Are Wonderful Support program. For the past 15 years ERASE, in partnership with 10 communities Youth Service Bureaus and local organizations, has for less than \$4,000 per year, planned and implemented this training event for over 400 youth per year, from 15 towns, in grades 6-12. PAWS enables ERASE to have ongoing relationships with the schools in the region, which is essential to collecting information for planning. Additionally, this training event fills a gap, identified through assessment, of providing resources and personal development for youth involved in their communities' peer helping programs such as SADD-Students Against Destructive Decisions and Peer Advocates. ERASE and its youth-serving partners are able to obtain donated space from Manchester Community

College and over 30 volunteer presenters to provide workshops to participating youth. The incentive for the College and the volunteer presenters to provide space and training are that they are able to market their organizations to youth from the communities they serve.

Again, I urge you to oppose *Raised Bill 6262 – An Act Concerning The Regional Action Councils*. I fear the passage of this bill puts the essential resources ERASE provides the Town of East Hartford and 15 other communities at risk.

Thank you for your time and consideration.