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Senator Harris, Representative Ritter and members of the Public Health Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to speak to you today on the critical impacts that condensing fourteen Regional Action Councils into five will have on our local communities. The current economic conditions only support an increased need for more prevention efforts on a local level, particularly in the area of substance abuse and addictions where Regional Action Councils are specifically devoted. The programs and assistance Regional Action Councils provide in substance abuse prevention could potentially increase federal, state, and local revenue. Unfortunately, the proposed changes would have an adverse effect on the success of ongoing as well as new substance abuse prevention efforts for our local community coalitions that ultimately drive the state and national initiatives

There are so many unique successes in the work of each of the Regional Action Councils that help to contribute to a united statewide coalition of prevention. Today I will speak from my direct experience as an Executive Director in the southeastern region and how the consolidation would adversely affect our communities.

### **Different needs**

In our eastern region we see such complex diversities and needs not only across 41 towns, but even within these towns there are districts and boroughs. So for SERAC, though we may officially collaborate with twenty towns, we interface within thirty plus communities and we already struggle with the capacity to meet all their needs. Under our current system we are afforded the flexibility to implement appropriately targeted prevention programming. Under the proposed plan, the Eastern Region would consist of 41 very diverse towns (not to mention the many small communities within each town such as military sectors, college communities, and tribal communities) served by a single regional entity. One single entity implementing prevention programming over such a wide and diverse area will limit programming options, opportunities for local environmental changes, and grassroots coalitions. It is highly likely without a local Regional Action Council in both the Northeast and Southeast, the current surge in the movement of prevention work would stall. (In this scenario the communities most likely to lose prevention resources are the small, rural, communities which need them most because they often have the fewest local resources and the magnitude of the problem is often *assumed* to be less than in larger cities.

### **Personal Relationships**

Personal relationships and local networking are key to prevention. Because of these personal relationships we are able to facilitate and encourage prevention efforts which otherwise might not occur. One example of this has been our ability to reassure and convince reluctant communities to conduct youth surveys in order to determine the true magnitude of substance use among local youth. As a result of having conducted these surveys, these local communities in turn have a better understanding of the problem and are now better equipped to begin planning for and implementing appropriate preventions efforts. If we were serving a larger number of communities we would be unable to offer this kind of personalized service.

Without assistance from the Regional Action Council, more than half of the towns in the current identified region would not have ANY capacity for substance abuse prevention. The Regional Action Council also essential to maintain pro-active and effective collaboration between law enforcement (where many rural towns do not have access to SRO's and local police enforcement), hospitals, health districts, youth-serving organizations, schools, youth, parents, media, and local services and supports.

In fact, to maintain and ideally surpass our current goals and work for twice our current regional size, more funding and resources would be needed to ensure continued success rates rather than less.

### **Funding**

The proposed plan would not only cut the number of prevention entities from 14 to 5 but it will also presumably be associated with reduced overall state funding for prevention efforts. In addition to this loss of state prevention funding, condensing the regional action councils to 5 regional offices will result in a significant loss of federal and other grant funds which currently support prevention efforts throughout Connecticut. Both the Northeast RAC and Southeast RAC have federal grants and under the proposed plan one would have to give up the grant; under federal funding rules.