



Testimony

Bart Russell, Executive Director

Connecticut Council of Small Towns

Before the Judiciary Committee

March 10, 2010

Last year, the legislature passed legislation consolidating the state's probate courts. The legislation included a provision requiring a minimum 20 hour work week for the judges of the new, much larger probate districts and extending health insurance benefits to judges who only worked a 20 hour week. The law also allowed these judges to maintain their private practices.

At that time, COST testified regarding concerns with how a judge in a new, much larger district could provide adequate levels of probate services to citizens if he/she were only working 20 hours per week. In larger, consolidated districts, it is critical that probate judges be available on a full-time basis to assist residents with probate matters.

We therefore support SB-371, which requires probate judges to work full-time in order to be eligible for health insurance benefits and urge the committee to require judges to work a minimum of 40 hours to help ensure that our citizens have the opportunity to resolve probate matters more efficiently.

Connecticut's probate courts handle a multitude of matters, including: decedent's estates and other wealth transfer issues; child custody, guardianship, termination of parental rights and adoption; mental health commitments; name changes; conservatorships of elderly or incapacitated persons; interpretation of living wills; and guardianships of the mentally retarded.

Clearly, these are issues that must be addressed in a timely manner. For families dealing with these issues, delays in scheduling probate court hearings and processing paperwork could jeopardize the care and well-being of family members.