

Connecticut Association of Assessing Officers, Inc.

David Dietsch, President
City of Waterbury Assessor

February 18, 2010

Re: POSITIVE SUPPORT OF HB #5059 AAC APPOINTMENT of MUNICIPAL ASSESSORS

Representative Ryan, Senator Prague & Members of the Labor and Public Employees Committee

Good Afternoon,

I speak to you today in support of HB #5059 An Act Concerning the Appointment of Municipal Assessors. My endorsement has the unanimous support of the Executive Board of the CAAO of which I am a President.

The laws concerning the appointment of municipal assessor have remained unchanged since the 1940's. At that time, many/most assessors were elected and the position was considered political. For towns wishing to appoint an assessor, it was still considered political with language that "set the terms of office" and required "re-appointments every 2-4 years".

Today, there are no more elected assessors and barring local language via a charter, ordinance, or union contract that states otherwise, most assessors must be re-appointed every 2-4 years. In the last two years, four (4) different assessors were not re-appointed. These were not disciplinary discharges. Their stories are scary and in some instances, assessors were pressured to reduce individual assessment values and when they acted in an ethical manner, refusing to allow circumvention of the assessment process, and ensuring fairness to all taxpayers, after the next election, they were rewarded with a termination, via not being "re-appointed". There was absolutely no warning and no claims of poor performance/wrong doing.

If this dangerous trend is allowed to continue it will result in qualified, experienced, assessment professionals leaving the governmental sector for the private sector which will weaken a core component of the local property tax system. It will also limit the number of experienced, qualified applicants a municipality will receive when they are trying to fill a vacancy for a position that will be perceived as a 2-4 year political appointment or a very risky career move.

We feels the position of assessor, as well as the job function, has changed over the last 60 years. Assessors are now required to be trained, educated, experienced, and certified by the state of Connecticut in order to certify a town's Grand List. The revaluation cycle has been accelerated from 10 to 5 years. For this to be a politically appointed position makes little sense in today's day and age.

We believe that HB 5059 is a "good government bill" that will:

- ◆ Supports the role of the municipal Assessor, a core position in the determination & administration of the local property tax, while removing political pressure, repercussions, and circumvention of the state statutes.
- ◆ Supports municipalities when filling a vacancy by attracting a greater number of qualified, experienced applicants who are applying for a job/career, rather than a 2-4 year political appointment.
- ◆ Supports taxpayers by ensuring a fair and equitable determination & administration of the local property tax.

Lastly, HB 5059 calls for assessors to only be removed for "good cause". We recognize this language may garner opposition and would propose eliminating the "good cause" from HB 5059 as long as this position is changed from political (with terms and re-appointments) to apolitical (with a single appointment and/or making it a hired position).

The Connecticut Association of Assessing Officers thanks you for your time and asks that you support HB #5059 in that we believe this aides assessor, municipalities, and most importantly the taxpayers of Connecticut by ensuring a fair and equitable determination and proper administration of the local property tax across the state.

At this time I would entertain any questions that you may have.

Respectfully submitted,

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