

March 7, 2011

To: Government Administration & Elections Committee

From: Ann Letendre  
29 Gottier Dr  
Vernon, CT 06066

Subject: Proposed Bill HB 5885

***AN ACT CONCERNING POTENTIALLY POLITICALLY BIASED LEGAL  
ADVICE OF TOWN ATTORNEYS.***

I am writing in strong support of this proposed bill. The bill plugs a hole in local government process, a hole that threatens the public trust.

We have experienced this situation first hand in Vernon.

I have served on local commissions in Vernon for over 40 years: inland wetlands commission (18 years); the Open Space Task Force as chairperson (22 years), and the Hockanum River Linear Park as chairperson (30 years). In these roles I work with town staff. I know and understand local government.

The public, and those of us that serve on local boards, expect that the Town Attorney will provide unbiased, non-partisan judgment in decision-making.

In Vernon we have the unusual situation in which the Town Committee Chairperson also serves as Town Attorney.

This duality of roles has resulted in an uncomfortable position for appointed commissioners and for town staff. The question is always hanging out there for them: is the Town Attorney's decision influenced by his political party and his role as party chair – or is it truly unbiased and non-partisan? Confusion and stress result.

The public expects, and has a right to expect, that legal decisions and counsel are based on the merits of the arguments, rather than on political motivation. But this dual role undermines public confidence in this expectation. It causes the public to raise an eyebrow - and question the possibility of political motive having influences the judgment of the Town Attorney.

In the interest of open, fair and just local government, I urge your support of Bill #5885. All towns - and all parties - in Connecticut will be the better for it.