



**STATEMENT REGARDING
House Bill 5460: AAC Captive Audience Meetings**

**Labor and Public Employees Committee
February 1st, 2011**

The MetroHartford Alliance is the region's economic development leader and Hartford's Chamber of Commerce. Our investors include businesses of all sizes, health care providers, institutions of higher education, and regional municipalities. Although diverse, all of these investors share a common interest in the full economic recovery of our state supported by the attraction and retention of jobs, capital and talent.

While we continue to face such extreme fiscal challenges, we urge the legislature to make Connecticut's economic recovery its only priority. Consider the facts:

- Currently, Connecticut has the highest deficit per capita in the entire nation compounded by the highest bonded indebtedness.
- We are facing deficits in the next biennium that exceed \$7B, while unfunded public retiree pensions and healthcare hover around \$40B.

Given these enormous obstacles to growth, any legislation that is irrelevant to the vital work that is being done to balance the state budget should be postponed until the state is on solid financial ground. In fact, any legislation that exacerbates these conditions by making our state *less* competitive should be rejected on arrival by anyone who truly wishes to create jobs in Connecticut.

At this time, to consider legislation like House Bill 5460 that would make Connecticut less competitive and make it difficult for employers to communicate to their employees regarding the political climate, pending legislation that may affect their employment, charitable giving or other community activities or events is not the

answer. Under the National Labor Relations Act, employers must already comply with strict federal regulations regarding employer-employee speech. In 2004, the Connecticut General Assembly considered this concept and chose not to pursue it. In the bill summary, the Office of Legislative Research referenced the existing protections of the NLRA, "The NLRA guarantees the employer's right to express an opinion about unionization as long as the employer does not also threaten reprisal or promise a benefit."

By attempting to frustrate the purpose of existing federal law, House Bill 5460 would further decrease our ability to be competitive in a highly volatile marketplace. Even proposing this legislation sends a message to Connecticut's existing employers that we are not a friendly place for them to remain or expand. The reality needs to be quite the opposite. At this time of intense global competition for jobs, capital and talent, we cannot overstate the importance of sending a pro-growth message to incumbent businesses considering expansion as well as those looking to relocate.

As an economic development organization and the capital city's chamber of commerce, we ask you to work with us to help Connecticut stand out as a *premier* place to do business and create jobs, and take steps to help us strengthen our economy for future growth, not weaken it further. Focusing instead on controlled spending and addressing our budget deficits is critical to our ability to retain and attract jobs, and this must be our top priority.

For all of these reasons, we urge the defeat of House Bill 5460.