

# Testimony

## In support of H.B. 5053 AAC Volunteer Fire Police Patrols.

### Planning And Development Committee Wednesday, March 2, 2011

Dear Senator Cassano, Representative Gentile, Senator Fasano, Representative Aman and members of the Planning And Development Committee:

My name is Joseph Kaliko . I am testifying in support of H.B. 5053.

I am President of the Cos Cob Fire Police Patrol, Inc., in Greenwich. HB 5053 seeks to amend C.G.S. Sec. 7-323r which established a supplemental grant award program for Volunteer Fire Companies (emphasis added) providing services on designated state highways. The statute allows the State Fire Administrator to administer the program in support of these volunteers.

Eligible fire companies (emphasis added) may receive direct payment of grant funds or may use the funds as credits for fee-based services provided by the Commission on Fire Prevention and Control (the "Fire Academy") . In 2010 approximately \$1,200 was paid to volunteer fire companies who respond to calls on highways like I-95. This program replaced a decades old formula that compensated fire companies with \$100 per response. In Greenwich alone, this would annually have amounted to tens of thousands of dollars to help defray response costs.

The budget for grants in fiscal 2011 is \$105,000; resulting in a grant of about \$650 per fire company that applies. Fire Departments (as opposed to Volunteer Fire Companies), do not benefit from the program. Organizations like my Volunteer Fire Police Patrol (emphasis added), have received **nothing** from the section 7-323r program even though we have responded annually to literally hundreds (in fact thousands over the years) of calls for help on I-95 in Greenwich.

The reason is that "Fire Police Patrols" are not explicitly mentioned in the statute (emphasis added). So opined former AG Blumenthal in 2010 after our First Selectman and Fire Chief wrote to the AG advocating for our entitlement to a grant.

To the extent possible, I am asking this committee to not reduce or eliminate funding for this program. It my opinion that the program should be expanded. The truck used by our patrol to go up on I-95 cost \$500,000 in 2004. It will need to be replaced. Our patrol recently purchased a backup utility truck, costing the volunteers (without financial assistance from the town) another \$100,000. Running a volunteer Fire Police Patrol is expensive. We are cash strapped after purchasing our new utility and could not even afford a stokes basket needed to carry accident victims. The cost of the basket would have been offset had we been entitled to receive a section 7-323r grant. Expense is compounded by the expenditure of our time and risk of injury (or death) working on state highways where we protect the public and fellow emergency workers.

Our patrol is the primary responder to the highway in Greenwich. The supplement/credit makes a difference. Recently we could not afford to send a trainee to the Fire Academy. Other volunteer Fire Police Patrols in the state would also benefit from the proposed amendment.

Please consider that the program aids not only the volunteers, but municipalities that are traversed by limited access highways . There is a special burden on these municipalities, since they must respond to accidents on these highways. I was hoping to focus your attention via this testimony on the fact that volunteer Fire Police Patrols help ease this burden on state roads.

Times are tough financially. Governor Malloy's budget has eliminated section 7-323r grants. However, I feel that the state has a responsibility here it should not shirk. This is a multi-municipality problem and the state is not only burdening municipalities; but volunteers who risk their lives asking nothing in return. An intangible is the savings in equipment costs, manpower and training expense that the state would otherwise have to bear if the volunteers were not there to shoulder the responsibility.

For these reasons I believe the legislature should address this issue and amend the statute as proposed; expand the program funding to provide a more meaningful reimbursement/grant, if possible; and then present the bill to the Governor for his further consideration (or reconsideration) and signature.

Respectfully submitted,

Joseph J. Kaliko