

March 2, 2011 CT State Legislature Public Hearing on Property Tax

Representatives, staff members, and members of the public, my name is John Marshall Lee, a tax payer and resident for 23 years in Bridgeport CT. Previously I lived in Fairfield CT for 23 years after birth and education in the New Haven area. I am active in our local Black Rock Homeowners Association, the anti-blight initiative, Black Rock Neighborhood Revitalization Zone, am a founder in 2008 of the Black Rock Food Pantry, a member of the Citizen's Union that reviews Bridgeport's allocation of Community Development Block Grant Funds and as a Rotary International member for 46 years am active in multiple and varied community service activities regularly.

I am here today to speak to legislation that will provide relief to homeowners in areas where property taxes are disproportionately high and threaten the ability of homeowners to stay in their homes. The first is HB #5332, An Act Concerning Property Tax Relief. Getting municipalities to participate in regional activities that will stretch their revenues is positive. Passing on a portion of the savings thus realized from these agreements to homeowners is likewise positive. The initial effect may be small, but it is recognition of the direction we need to pursue in government on the State level and locally and is at least symbolic of your attention to the plight of these homeowners.

The second legislation is HB #5334; An Act Concerning Tax Assessments grants to municipalities the ability to assess a lower tax rate to a portion of the properties of low to moderate-income homeowners. This is not of personal advantage, but again will allow government to adjust in appropriate areas in a time of great need. Let the local powers closer to the situation make the decision.

HB #5580, An Act Establishing a State Wide Mill Rate for the Taxation of Motor Vehicles argues for fairness that has long been sought. Please seriously consider this act this year as it will indicate an attempt at fairness in taxation across the State.

Finally, I would speak of a long term issue that needs research and action by the State legislature. This morning the CT Post reported that the Bridgeport Grand List stands at \$9 Billion but that \$3 Billion is non-taxpaying for a variety of reasons. There is government property, municipal, State and Federal. There are hospitals. Some of these generate payment in lieu of taxes but not at a level that is comparable to property owners. There is property owned by religious institutions. Let us ignore those properties. It would leave us primarily with property that is owned by or that house not for profit organizations serving the public as 501c3 entities. As such they enjoy special status for revenues being non-taxable. And most of these have a requirement of annual statements of financial condition and services rendered. However, since these programs benefit from fire, police and other municipal public programs, what public purpose is served by the physical location and properties being removed from municipal property taxation? These organizations do not produce offspring, so perhaps they should not contribute to that portion of local budgets, often around 50% of local budgets for that purpose, but allowing municipalities the right to tax these properties at some level, especially in core cities like Bridgeport where so many not for profits gather to serve local and regional communities would provide assistance to these cities, and again provide a greater sense of reality to the actual programs of the expense of being a City resident.

John Marshall Lee
30 Beacon Street
Bridgeport CT 06605
Daytime: 203-259-9642
Home: 203-366-3667
peopleins@aol.com