



State of Connecticut

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
STATE CAPITOL
HARTFORD, CONNECTICUT 06106-1591

REPRESENTATIVE PAMELA Z. SAWYER
FIFTY-FIFTH ASSEMBLY DISTRICT

HOUSE REPUBLICAN DEPUTY LEADER-AT-LARGE

LEGISLATIVE OFFICE BUILDING, ROOM 4200
HARTFORD, CT 06106-1591

CAPITOL: (860) 240-8700
FAX: (860) 240-0207

EMAIL: Pamela.Sawyer@housegop.ct.gov

MEMBER

APPROPRIATIONS COMMITTEE
HIGHER EDUCATION AND EMPLOYMENT ADVANCEMENT COMMITTEE
LEGISLATIVE MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE
TRANSPORTATION COMMITTEE

Good morning Chairs Cassano and Gentile, Ranking Members Fasano and Aman, and members of the Planning and Development Committee. I am here on behalf of the House Republican Caucus to comment on House Bill 6411 *An Act Establishing A Task Force To Study Ways in Which To Provide Municipal Mandate Relief*.

While I would like to thank the committee for raising this bill and continuing to focus on the costly burden of unfunded mandates, I feel the time to act is now. The legislature has been discussing the issue of unfunded mandates for years. We have studied the various ideas and options to reduce unfunded mandates for many years, and if there were ever a time to provide relief to our municipalities, it's now. We don't need another study; we need to take immediate action.

On January 25th the Legislative Republican Caucuses put forth its Common Sense Proposals that focused on reducing the burden that the state puts on our municipalities. In addition to proposing legislation to provide municipal mandate relief, we have also hosted roundtable discussions with our mayors and first selectmen. We listened to their concerns and where possible, reflected their wishes in our bill proposals. I know many of you have done the same. So while I could support H.B. 6411 if it seeks to create a task force to study "new" ways to provide municipal mandate relief, I don't think I can support it if the language will just reflect what I feel we should have enacted into law long ago.

I would ask the committee to consider some of the Legislative Republicans' proposals for municipal mandate including:

- Delay for two years the implementation of any requirements under "Race to the Top" related mandates due to the failure of the state to qualify for federal funding.
- Require a 2/3 majority vote in the legislature to pass any municipal unfunded mandates. Municipalities have complained for years that the state legislature continually passes unfunded mandates without properly scrutinizing the affects they have on municipalities.

- Postpone the phase-in of 17 year olds into the juvenile court system until July 2014. This would provide additional time for municipalities and local police departments to prepare for this costly mandate.
- Prohibit the consideration of municipal budget reserve fund balances of 10% or less by an arbitration panel in calculating the financial capability of a municipality and also allow a municipality to reject an arbitration award by a vote of two-thirds of the members of its legislative body and to provide that any such rejected award shall be subject to contract negotiations rather than a second arbitration, except that if no agreement is reached by the date forty-five days after the date of such rejection, parties shall submit to final and binding arbitration.
- Review our in-school suspension mandate. As you know, because the legislature did not act, that law went into effect. Perhaps our municipalities can share with you how that has affected them and what we might do to provide relief on this issue if this mandate has continued to be costly to comply with.

The current fiscal problems that the state is facing have forced us to raise taxes, cut spending and borrow in record amounts. Municipalities are dealing with the same fiscal problems as the state, battling increased costs and declining revenue. In addition to the legislature's focus on closing the state's growing budget deficit without increasing the tax burden, we also need to be cognizant of how our actions affect our citizens' local property tax bills. This current financial downturn has given us, as lawmakers, a unique opportunity to try to address issues that come before us with innovative, no-cost proposals.

I look forward to working with the Committee and General Assembly in crafting a proposal that will provide some real relief to our municipalities and local taxpayers.

Thank you.