



State of Connecticut

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES STATE CAPITOL

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Planning and Development Committee
Public Hearing
March 21, 2011

Good Morning Senator Cassano, Rep Gentile, Sen Fasano and Rep. Amann, and Members of the Planning and Development Committee:

I want to thank the committee for raising House Bill 6411, An Act Establishing A Task Force To Study Ways In Which To Provide Municipal Mandate Relief, and bringing the issue of unfunded state mandates up for a public hearing as the Connecticut Conference of Municipalities and The Council of Small Towns have been pleading for relief for over 10 years.

After hearing from Governor Malloy when he proposed his budget, and having reviewed financial reports and forecasts from the Office of Policy and Management and the Office of Fiscal Analysis – it is crystal clear that our state government has a huge deficit problem. In fact current projections suggest Connecticut will have deficits of over \$3 billion for the next 2 years. In addition we all recognize that the prospect of getting additional funding from the Federal government is also improbable for the same reason.

Our towns and cities are thus facing the financial reality that they cannot count on the state or federal government to help them with their own fiscal needs.

Is there something state government can do to help our communities in place of giving them money? In my judgment the answer is yes.

For the past decade the Connecticut Conference of Municipalities and the Council of Small Towns have repeatedly asked for relief from unfunded state mandates. In 2005 the legislature created a task force to study unfunded state mandates and a report on their findings were due January 2006. In February 2006 CBIA issued a detailed report on unfunded state mandates.

Now it is 2011 and everyone is still discussing what to do about unfunded state mandates which everyone agrees is a huge financial burden to local government and schools, and which seem very unfair during tough economic times like now.

If ever there is a year to provide relief from unfunded state mandates THIS IS THE YEAR.

I'd ask this committee to approve, and for the legislature to adopt, "suspending" just 1 or 2 mandates for two years, effective July 1, 2011. These mandates would not be eliminated; rather they would simply be suspended until the economy improves.

One example I would offer as a suggestion is the suspension of professional development days for teachers. If this proposal were adopted I have been told by the Bristol School Superintendent, Dr. Philip Streiffer, **there would be a savings of \$800,000 a year.**

I have talked to several teachers and they are not opposed to this idea. Dr. Streiffer has said this will have no impact on the curriculum, on the ability of teachers to teach, and on the students' ability to learn. With respect to the concern expressed that this idea would violate credit requirements for teachers I would submit this requirement also could be suspended for 2 years – all this in the interest of providing financial relief to schools and local budgets.

Why would the teachers and the union be receptive to this proposal?

- 1) This requirement would be "suspended" – not eliminated – and would be for only 2 years.
- 2) Teachers will not be penalized because the extra credit requirements would be suspended for 2 years.
- 3) The role of teachers helping to provide financial relief would be viewed positively by local officials and taxpayers.

In sum I'd submit that providing relief from 1 or 2 unfunded state mandates is a far more attractive proposal in providing financial help to our local government rather than forcing them to increase property taxes higher. I hope you all view this proposal as a constructive approach to helping our municipalities and that you will pass legislation which will help our local leaders and taxpayers.

Sincerely,

Rep. Whit Betts – 78th District