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Statement of Brian S. Becker
State Representative for the 19th Assembly District
before the
Committee on Planning and Development
Connecticut General Assembly
February 18, 2011
in support of
HB 5780
An Act Concerning Interlocal Agreements

Chairman Cassano, Chairman Gentile, Ranking Member Fasano, Ranking Member Aman, and the other distinguished members of the Planning and Development Committee, thank you for making HB 5780, An Act Concerning Interlocal Agreements, a committee bill and for taking the time to hear testimony on it.

As you know, there is a huge interest in regionalism. Municipalities that want to work together to save costs and retain or improve services should be encouraged to do so, and should not have state law be an obstacle.

Right now, we have two statutes on the books that are related to the municipalities' authority to work together and to the process they must follow to do so. Section 148cc, the newer of the two statutes grants blanket authority to municipalities. Basically, the statute says that whatever a municipality can do on its own, it can do with another. This is the way it should be – nice and easy.

The older statute, Section 7-339a, states that municipalities that want to work together can enter into "interlocal agreements," but can do so only in the substantive areas listed in the statute. While the list is long, it is clearly not everything. This begs the question, "If Municipality A wants to work with Municipality B in a substantive area that is not on the list for interlocal agreements, can the two municipalities still work together and, if so, what type of agreement would they be authorized to enter into to document their understanding?"

Arguably the statutes are in conflict with each other. At best they are confusing. LCO agrees with these last two statements and endorses fixing the statutes.

In addition to fixing the statutes and making them consistent, HB 5780 also seeks to simplify the approval process for municipalities. Rather than going through the time-consuming and cumbersome process set forth in the current statutes, the bill calls for interlocal agreements to be approved by the legislative body of the municipality after an opportunity for public comment. It also makes clear that the opportunity for public comment does not require a public hearing. This should make the approval process very straightforward.

As further evidence of why this bill is a good idea, I have with me today the Mayor of West Hartford, Scott Slifka, who will address potential cost savings to cities and towns, and West Hartford Deputy Corporation Counsel, Pat Alair, who will speak to the amount of time some corporation counsel around the state have spent trying to reconcile the current statutes. Both of these gentlemen had input into the proposed bill.

Before turning the microphone over to Mayor Slifka, I just want to point out that this is a bipartisan bill signed by more than 25 legislators from the House and Senate, including over half the members of this committee. I hope that after today, you will continue to support this bill.

Thank you.