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CITY OF DANBURY

FIRE DEPARTMENT

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Testimony of Geoffrey Herald, Chief, City of Danbury Fire Department

PUBLIC SAFETY AND SECURITY COMMITTEE PUBLIC HEARING

22 FEBRUARY 2011

Good afternoon Senator Joan Hartley and Representative Stephen Dargan and honorable members of the Public Safety and Security Committee. Thank you for this opportunity to present this testimony before you.

I am Geoffrey Herald, Chief of the City of Danbury Fire Department.

I am before you to speak in support of House Bill 5489: AN ACT CONCERNING AN ADDITIONAL STATE FIRE SCHOOL. I ask today that you designate the City of Danbury Fire Training Facility a State Regional Fire School. The following Fire Departments from the region are supporting this petition: Brookfield,

Sherman, New Fairfield, Bethel, Ridgefield, Botsford, Sandy Hook, Stony Hill, Bridgewater, Georgetown, and Southbury. These and several others have used the school for various training activities over the last year. These others include Northville, New Milford, Southbury Training School, Dodgingtown, Newtown Hook and Ladder, Brewster N.Y., Kensington and the Federal Correctional Institution.

Fire services have long practiced what is today called regionalization. Through mutual aid we have long worked together to support our surrounding communities. Since September of 2001, the need for regional response to emergencies has become ever more apparent. Fire and Emergency services now provide much more than fire prevention and suppression activities. We respond to unknown substances, emergency medical calls, public service and natural disasters. Response to the threat of terrorism with the use of Weapons of Mass Destruction will fall first to the local Fire Services as well.

In addition to responding, there are increasing demands made of the Fire Service for training and certification from agencies as diverse as the FAA and OSHA. These include local, State and Federal mandates. As a result, Firefighters across the State spend increasing time in the classroom and on the training ground learning how to deal with these and other issues.

Very few departments can fully meet all possible needs with today's limited fiscal and infrastructure capabilities. There are no regional fire schools in the northern Fairfield County area. As the Danbury area has grown, the need for a facility in our region has also grown significantly. When granted, the Regional Fire School designation will have many benefits to the cities and towns of the region. Having a Regional School where the many required programs can be presented locally saves in travel and costs and reduces wear and tear on vehicles. Importantly, it will save time as the closest Regional School is an hour away.

The state Fire Commission on Prevention and Control has partnered with the regional fire schools to provide modern thorough training to our Fire Services.

By providing a venue where Departments can train together, the region will gain from common instruction, experience, knowledge and understanding. Through interaction and mutual exchange of ideas at a Regional Fire School facility, we will learn one another's potential and capabilities. This symbiosis will assist in the mutual aid responses and cooperation on the emergency scenes in our region and State, thereby directly accomplishing the primary goals of regionalization.

During the past three years, I have gathered much support for the proposal. The Housatonic Valley Council of Elected Officials unanimously voted to support the petition at their meeting of 17 October 2008. They reiterated their support in January. In addition, we have the support of regional Fire Chiefs and the Fairfield County Fire Chiefs Association. At their meeting of 23 October 2008, the Education Committee for the Connecticut State Firefighters Association voted to support the proposal. They too continue to support this effort. A number of corporate entities have also endorsed the proposal. These include Boehringer-Ingelheim, Bedoukian Research and Western Connecticut State University.

As we move toward greater regionalization, training with our mutual aid partners will become ever more critical. Adoption of H.B.5489 will assist in reaching this goal. Thank you for your time in this matter. If I may be of assistance, please contact me at 203-796-1550.

Sincerely,

Geoffrey Herald,
Chief, Danbury Fire Department