



**TESTIMONY OF SANDRA B. JOHNSON, EDP
VICE PRESIDENT AND DIRECTOR OF BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT
METROHARTFORD ALLIANCE
STATEMENT OF SUPPORT FOR HOUSE BILL 6139: *An Act Increasing the
Independence of the Board of Directors of Bradley International Airport*
TRANSPORTATION COMMITTEE
February 23rd, 2011**

Good afternoon, Senator Maynard, Representative Guerrero and members of the Committee. I had the opportunity to present testimony last week before Commerce and appreciate the opportunity to come before you today. Specifically, I am here to request your endorsement for greater autonomy for the Bradley International Airport Board of Directors – autonomy in composition of the Board and responsibility of the Board.

My name is Sandra Johnson and I am Vice President and Director of Business Development, domestic and international, for the MetroHartford Alliance. The Alliance is the Hartford region's lead economic development organization and the only fully accredited economic development organization in the State. I lead the business recruitment, retention and expansion efforts for the Hartford Region and sit on the Bradley Development League Board as well as the CEDAS Board.

With our focus on creating jobs, retaining and attracting talent and attracting capital investment to the region and State, we need to be maximizing every asset. As an economic developer, I see Bradley International as one of our strongest, underleveraged assets. Today, we can witness where our global economic reset has created some winners and some losers. The businesses that are nimble and able to be responsive to markets and conditions have been successful. Bradley International also needs to be nimble to fully achieve its potential and successfully compete with other airports.

There is a new term developing – aerotropolis. Where rail hubs once created the centers of commerce and development, airports are now being viewed as the 21st century equivalent, further amping up our competition. We appeal to you, our legislators to embrace that vision and provide Bradley with every opportunity to open the door to greater business prospects for our State and region.

Overall, the Alliance's investors that include health care providers, institutions of higher education, regional municipalities and businesses of all sizes, are very supportive of Bradley Airport being a robust airport system. Businesses recognize the tremendous value and potential of having an international airport located in our region and accordingly have made it a focus of our organizational strategic plan. At a time when resources are so constrained, permitting greater autonomy and flexibility to enhance and leverage existing economic drivers such as Bradley Airport would be low cost with potential high impact.

It needs to be said that we applaud the outstanding Department of Transportation staff that perform the airport's runway and facilities maintenance every day. This legislative proposal, however, specifically addresses the governance of the airport, and we agree that it is important to consider whether the current governing structure enhances the airport's ability to grow and stimulate economic development in our region or not. For example, providing the Bradley Board of Directors more autonomy could facilitate hiring decisions regarding staff at the airport including setting appropriate compensation and would also give the Board greater control over the airport's budget for marketing and route development. As a result, the Board would determine how and when all airport staff are approved for travel for route development and marketing purposes. Such autonomy would put Bradley on par with other states' privately-owned and operated airports, with whom we are competing for direct flights and international service. Those airports have direct control over their marketing dollars and, therefore, greater flexibility assembling the incentive packages that are critical to attract new airlines. Bradley is at a disadvantage and has potentially missed out on opportunities to grow based on this lack of autonomy. We lost our one transatlantic flight due to the steep rise in fuel costs although it demonstrated market demand. Had Bradley been more nimble, could there have been a better opportunity to preserve the flight? Maybe.

Given the enormous obstacles Connecticut faces to job retention and growth, it is critical that we focus on legislation that is low cost and high impact with regard to long-term economic development. House Bill 6139 is an example of legislation that will promote business development and, therefore, long-term job growth.

Thank you for your time and consideration,

Sandra B. Johnson, EDP
Vice President and Director of Business Development