



**Testimony  
Bart Russell, Executive Director  
Connecticut Council of Small Towns  
Before the Education Committee  
March 5, 2012**

**Re: SB-300, An Act Concerning Early Childhood Education**

The Connecticut Council of Small Towns (COST) *supports the intent* of SB-300 but is concerned that the bill will impose another unfunded mandate on municipalities.

The state is currently in the planning process of creating a coordinated system of early childhood care and education by July of 2013. SB-300 outlines a plan to phase-in statewide access to school readiness for all eligible three and four-year olds.

COST appreciates that the bill recognizes the need for supporting access to pre-school programs for eligible students in *all* Connecticut towns and not just priority and competitive school districts. However, implementing school readiness programs involves huge costs associated with building, expanding and furnishing schools and classrooms, hiring qualified teachers, transporting students, developing curricula and purchasing supplies, etc. Therefore, we are concerned that if the state fails to fully fund the program, small towns and cities will be on the hook to pay for such state-mandated programs.

Although we certainly support the goal of providing students with access to early childhood programs, Connecticut's small towns and cities continue to face difficult budget years and are struggling to adopt budgets that will continue to provide core academic programs for K-12 students as well as comply with new curriculum standards and other mandates. We therefore urge lawmakers to carefully consider the costs of expanding access to school readiness programs and determine whether the state is in a position to commit to fully funding those costs.

In addition, we request that lawmakers take a hard look at reducing the number of unfunded mandates that drive up municipal education costs, including the Minimum Budget Requirement and binding arbitration. If mandate relief is addressed, districts may be successful in negotiating additional savings that could be targeted to strengthening academic programs.