

Connecticut Tax Collectors Association

Testimony in support of HB 5035 An Act Reducing Mandates for Municipalities.

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Good morning Senator Cassano, Representative Gentile and members of the Planning and Development Committee. Thank you for giving me the opportunity to testify on behalf of my office and the Connecticut Tax Collectors Association in **strong support of HB 5035 AAC Reducing Mandates for Municipalities.** I would strongly urge support of Section 1. of which makes changes to CGS 1-217 and would clarify the existing law by reverting to the pre-1999 text of the statute requiring written requests for redaction of mailing addresses.

The recent State Supreme Court decision confirms the interpretation of a Freedom of Information Act provision which prohibits disclosure of residential addresses of certain Federal, State and Municipal employees (CGS 1-217). Though the court's decision narrowly applies to motor vehicle records, legal counsel for state and municipal agencies, as well as attorneys for the FOI Commission, are advising that the court's decision will apply to **all** public records, including land records, voter lists, and tax rolls, as well as all other records in every office of every public agency in the state; and it applies to all formats of records, both printed and electronic.

The impact of this decision has an immediate effect on the Tax Collector's office. Not only would this require the identification of those in the "protected class," but redaction of all mailing addresses from the bills for these taxpayers as well as erasing addresses from the hard copies of tax payment records which are kept by Collectors. It would require that one person physically pull all bills which have been redacted and hand address them to those identified as "protected." It also would require a staff member to erase or black out addresses from posted ratebooks and validated bills which are kept for audit. Since we keep 15 years of posted ratebooks this is no small undertaking! With recent staffing cutbacks in tax offices across the state the extra time required to handle bills becomes a burden to tax collectors who are attempting to operate their offices as efficiently and effectively as possible while complying with all state statutes and mandates.

One of the major problems with attempting to comply with this ruling is the actual identification of those who are "protected" in Connecticut. Many shoreline towns, for example, have residents who are in their homes in the summer only and do not have residency in the town. It would be virtually impossible to identify all of those who should be redacted. Even if staff time were available in an office to hand address bills and redact prior payment records, how does a

collector assure the public that those records which are requested comply with the Supreme Court decision? If the records cannot be ensured to be completely redacted the municipality and any employee of that municipality may potentially be liable and face law suits as a result.

I respectfully request that this Committee and all our legislators consider these ideas. Do not place upon us the burden of attempting to determine who is member of the identified protected classes and require that our records not be open to the public because of potential liability.

Thank you for the opportunity to submit this testimony and your consideration in this matter.

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