



Testimony
Bart Russell, Executive Director
Connecticut Council of Small Towns
Before the Public Safety & Security Committee
March 6, 2012

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on behalf of the Connecticut Council of Small Towns (COST) relative to **HB-5392, An Act Concerning the State Response to a Declared State of Emergency**, which requires the development of an Emergency Preparedness Plan to coordinate state and local resources in the event of an emergency declared by the Governor.

Many mayors and first selectmen have expressed frustration and disappointment with response efforts to the two storm related events in Connecticut. Aside from the issues with regard to utility response efforts, small towns experienced problems in coordinating efforts with the state Department of Transportation relative to clearing critical roadways of debris and tree limbs, jeopardizing the ability of residents to obtain food, water or health care. In some small towns, there may be very few access roads and these roads need to be cleared as soon as possible to protect the health and safety of residents, particularly if there are evacuation orders.

During a response effort of this magnitude, clear channels of communication are vital. In addition to enhancing lines of communication with utilities, town officials must be able to communicate with state officials and other towns. Several towns noted that the state's CT Alert emergency messaging service was very effective in communicating to residents and businesses regarding evacuation orders, town services, clean-up information, etc. The state and towns should continue to encourage residents to sign-up for such alerts, particularly text messaging which was available when voice calling was unavailable.

COST and its member towns stand ready to work with lawmakers and public officials to develop an effective Emergency Preparedness Plan to coordinate response efforts more effectively to address the needs of residents and businesses. COST recommends the development of an emergency response plan that includes:

- 1) A comprehensive communications outreach plan to improve coordination of restoration efforts with town officials, including the dispatching of crews to ground downed wires;
- 2) Emergency contact information to ensure that town officials can get in contact with utilities and state agency officials to dispatch crews to immediately respond to dangerous or life threatening situations;
- 3) Identification of critical public safety and public health service areas, such as fire or police stations, hospitals, nursing homes, public water suppliers and elderly housing, as priority areas for restoration efforts, even if they are not in densely populated areas; and
- 4) Identification of key access roads in small towns that are vital to obtain food, water and health care services or to evacuate residents.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on this important issue.

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