



**TESTIMONY
ELIZABETH GARA
CONNECTICUT COUNCIL OF SMALL TOWNS
BEFORE THE
LEGISLATIVE PROGRAM REVIEW & INVESTIGATIONS COMMITTEE
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CONNECTICUT STATE POLICE STAFFING STANDARDS – STUDY UPDATE

The Connecticut Council of Small Towns (COST) thanks the committee for the opportunity to provide comments on the September 25 update on Connecticut State Police Staffing Standards. The study is charged with developing standards to help determine the proposed level of staffing for the Division of State Police.

COST's primary focus in reviewing the study is the relationship between proposed staffing levels and the impact on public safety in Connecticut's small towns and cities. We are concerned that efforts to reduce minimum staffing levels may drive certain changes in state policy, such as the consolidation of dispatch centers, that will undermine the safety of residents. In addition, we are concerned with how staffing levels will impact the costs and viability of the resident state trooper program, which many small towns rely on to protect their residents and businesses. COST therefore submits the following comments to the committee for its consideration:

■ **Dispatch Center Consolidations**

COST is concerned that dispatch center consolidations and staffing level decisions are jeopardizing public safety in Connecticut's small towns. It is our understanding that the dispatch consolidations could lead to some barracks being closed on nights and weekends, requiring troopers to drive farther to drop off prisoners at open barracks or jails, which is very likely to reduce patrol and emergency response times. It may also result in some emergency 911 calls going unanswered.

For example, state police consolidated the dispatch centers of barracks in Litchfield, Southbury and Canaan in northwestern Connecticut into one center in Litchfield. Each center had one dispatcher and one trooper around the clock. Now, the Litchfield center has three dispatchers and one trooper around the clock, resulting in a decrease of two troopers answering the phones per shift. Reassigning troopers who are familiar with the community and geographic area also creates concerns that response times may be negatively impacted.

COST recognizes the need to identify ways that towns may explore opportunities to share services and programs to reduce costs. However, it is unclear whether consolidating dispatch center will save sufficient resources to warrant jeopardizing public safety in our communities.

COST recommends that the committee examine how police staffing standards may drive the consolidation of dispatch centers and the impact on public safety.



Public Safety Answering Points - Consolidation

Last session, the legislature considered a bill which would have given the Office of State-Wide Emergency Telecommunications (OSET) broad authority to mandate consolidation of municipal, regional, multi-town and state public safety answering points and the funding of such consolidation based on a report prepared by Kimball Associates.

Public Safety Answering Points (PSAPs) are the facilities operated on a twenty-four hour basis to receive 9-1-1 calls and dispatch emergency response services or transferring or relaying 9-1-1 calls to other public safety agencies. The PSAP is the first point of reception of a 9-1-1 call.

Under current law, OSET provides towns with incentive grants as part of the state's efforts to regionalize dispatch services to increase efficiency and cost-effectiveness. However, a proposal in 2010 would have mandated regionalization of PSAPs and withheld funds to towns that did not comply with the mandate. The recommendations of the Connecticut PSAP Consolidation Feasibility Study also reference this approach. We are therefore concerned that changes in staffing standards may force the state to move away from an incentive-based approach, undermining a town's ability to provide critical emergency services to its residents and businesses.

Towns should be partners in a state-*facilitated* process – rather than state-*mandated* process - to encourage PSAPs to regionalize. Some towns may want to participate in regional programs but should not be forced to regionalize if they believe that it will undermine public safety or increase costs for their community. Other towns are facing barriers to regionalization due to existing labor contracts or other factors.

COST recommends that the committee consider the impact that any police staffing standards may have on efforts to pursue an incentive-based program, rather than a state-mandated approach, to encourage and facilitate the consolidation of public safety answering points.

Resident State Trooper Program

The Resident State Trooper program has been in place for over 60 years. As the study notes, fifty-five communities have chosen to utilize resident state troopers to provide public safety protection to their citizens. Currently, towns reimburse the state for 70% of the salary and benefits associated with the resident state trooper program in addition to overtime costs. In 2011, the state legislature *increased* from 70% to 100% the amount towns are required to reimburse the state for Resident State Trooper overtime costs.

Although the Resident State Trooper program is invaluable to Connecticut's small towns, increasing costs associated with the program are putting pressure on towns, particularly given flat levels of state aid and increasing costs associated with other critical programs, such as education. COST is very concerned regarding how minimum staffing levels may impact costs associated with the Resident State Trooper program.

COST recommends that the committee examine how police staffing standards may impact the Resident State Trooper program. We also recommend that the committee quantify overtime costs in its study to provide an accurate picture of the amount that towns are required to pay to support the resident state trooper program in their community.



Shared Services

Regional partnerships and shared services agreements are often looked to as opportunities for towns to reduce costs associated with various programs. COST members are reviewing the various options to reduce costs: 1) Sharing Resident State Troopers between two more trooper only towns, including towns that do not share a geographic border; and 2) Providing supervision of a regional police department or constabulary that includes two or more Resident Trooper Towns.

Section 29-5 of the Connecticut General Statutes currently authorizes the appointment of resident state troopers "in any town *or two or more adjoining towns lacking an organized police force.*"

Unfortunately, questions regarding liability have stymied efforts to move forward with sharing programs.

COST recommends that the committee explore opportunities for towns to share resident state troopers to reduce state and municipal costs associated with the program.

Training & Responsibilities of Resident State Troopers

COST met with DESPP last year and discussed issues regarding the training and responsibilities of resident state troopers and how the role of the troopers in our communities could be strengthened. The department indicated that it would reinstate training to ensure that troopers understood their role in the community, including providing monthly reports to mayors and selectmen, the local budget-making process, participating in community events, DARE programs, etc. This training is valuable to strengthening the Resident State Trooper program and we appreciate DESPP's commitment to reinstating this program.

COST recommends that the committee determine whether minimum staffing levels would have any impact on opportunities to reinstate training programs.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment. We look forward to working with the committee to examine the relationship between police staffing standards and public safety in Connecticut's small towns.