



State of Connecticut

HOUSE REPUBLICAN OFFICE

STATE CAPITOL

HARTFORD, CONN. 06106

Testimony in Support of Raised Bill 5392 Public Safety and Security Committee March 6, 2012

Chairs Dargan and Hartley, Ranking Members Giegler and Guglielmo, and distinguished members of the Public Safety and Security Committee, I appreciate the opportunity to submit testimony in support of **Raised Bill 5392, *An Act Concerning the State Response to a Declared State of Emergency.***

In 2011, Connecticut had the unfortunate fate of being hit by Tropical Storm Irene and by the October Nor'easter. The damages were widespread, damaging electric utilities, state and municipal infrastructure, and private properties. It quickly became apparent that the emergency response plans that had been in place were inadequate to meet the health and safety needs of our residents. As a result, recovery took days longer and the public trust in our state's ability to respond to emergencies was eroded.

The House Republican Caucus, as many other legislators have, has proposed a plan to prepare the state against future storms. The proposed plan is divided into three parts: government preparedness and response; utility preparedness and response; and community preparedness. This Committee has the government preparedness portion of our proposal before it for consideration.

The bill seeks to enhance cooperation and better improve coordination of services. The bill requires the Department of Emergency Services and Public Protection (DESPP) to collaborate with the Military Department, any other state agency, and Community Emergency Response Teams for the purpose of developing an Emergency Preparedness Plan to maximize state and local resources. For example, CL&P is running commercials showing their employees going beyond their everyday jobs in providing support services in times of an emergency. Our proposal envisions DESPP taking a similar action by reviewing what support services other government entities could render during emergencies. The Departments of Transportation and Corrections may be a good start because they have robust maintenance crews and emergency response practices already available and in place. It's very possible that additional agencies may also be able to provide resources. These resources should be readily available for deployment within moments of a declared emergency.

We also heard complaints from our municipalities regarding jurisdictional concerns. During the October storm for example, there were local crews working in areas removing debris or wreckage from local roads, but these crews were unable to do the same for state owned roads. As a result, residents and commuters along state roads had to wait longer to get their roads cleared. We're told in many instances, the local crews would have been more than happy to assist in the effort and so state resources could have been deployed to other areas. This bill addresses those concerns by having state and local governments create and implement a plan regarding jurisdictional control during emergencies.

Finally, the bill, in requiring DESPP to create an Emergency Preparedness Plan, envisions a requirement of real life training and practice drills. Such training should be done with the cooperation of appropriate local, regional and state officials, including the utilities. Real life training provides the type of training to address these emergencies in a way that written instructional materials and desk-top meetings do not. There should be simulated drills performed on a regular basis. Local, regional and state support units should clearly know their roles, properly communicate the status of their progress, and be proficiently in their tasks. Practice makes perfect, but perfection can't be achieved unless the practice is as realistic as possible. It's clear from the two storms that training and coordination among all parties need to be addressed and advanced.

Thank you for the opportunity to express our thoughts on this important issue. We look forward to working with you on this and other issues that come before us this session. I'd be more than happy to answer any questions you may have.