BILL FINCH
Mayor

March 15, 2013

Dear Honorable members of the General Assembly:

I am grateful for the opportunity to speak to you today.

I know that this is an extremely difficult budget year for the State of Connecticut. The Governor should be applauded for his historic investment in education and in the areas of our state, such as our City that need it most. Other parts of this proposed budget present a great challenge to our city.

I hope that this testimony allows you to appreciate the challenges we face not only in Bridgeport, but in all communities throughout Connecticut.

For the City of Bridgeport to succeed we realized that we must cut appropriations across our service departments; we must invest in our infrastructure and our citizenry, and maintain and generate revenues. The budgets I have proposed during my tenure as Mayor have allowed the City to excel on all three of these fronts.

First, allow me to provide you with background. During the worst economic downturn since the Great Depression, the City of Bridgeport responded by demonstrating fiscal discipline and responsibility to create a leaner, more efficient government without overburdening our residents. For five years, we've done more with less.

The City of Bridgeport has worked hard to keep taxes level by:

- **Cutting spending:**
  We have kept our wage increases to a minimum. We have more than 1,300 employees, yet we have managed to keep our growth in payroll at just 1.8% in the last budget cycle.
- **Reducing our workforce:**
  Since I first took office in 2007, we have reduced our Service Departments by over 225 positions. These position eliminations equated to a more than15% reduction in our workforce.
- **Reining in police and fire overtime**
- **Increasing recycling rates:**
  In 2011, the entire City moved to single stream recycling, which has helped triple our recycling rates. Recycling more means spending less money on tipping fees and healthier air for our residents to breathe.

Elimination of Motor Vehicle Tax in Connecticut:

Motor Vehicle Tax assessment in Bridgeport is just about $20 million. Of that, we collect annually approximately $17.5 million. Now you want our residents to be penalized again – those who own a home or business who would then have to pay for others to get a free ride. Ten-percent of our real property owners are still reeling from the subprime mortgage debacle, and are trying their best to hang onto their homes; and, our senior citizens struggle to continue to afford to stay in their own homes. Now is not the time to experiment with a tax shift before the impact is completely analyzed.

We need to consider and examine new taxation models and solutions to replace Connecticut's overreliance on property tax, the most regressive taxing system in the country. I support, and will wholeheartedly participate in such a thorough examination of potential new solutions.

All of these funding cuts have wide, sweeping effects. Let me briefly share the REAL possibilities with you. These proposed dollar cuts equate to:

- Eliminating: 151 uniformed police officers (37% of the force)
- Eliminating: 177 firefighters (60% of the force)
- Eliminating: The entire public facilities department. No road crews, building maintenance, sanitation, recycling, parks or recreation staff.

If this proposal were to pass in its current form, the average resident in Bridgeport who currently pays $6,200 in taxes, would see an estimated $1,280 increase – roughly $106 per month. As a homeowner myself, I understand that this is not easy. You understand that is not easy. Let us collectively assure it doesn't happen.

Respectfully submitted,

Bill Finch
Mayor