



7A

**State of Connecticut**  
**HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES**  
STATE CAPITOL  
HARTFORD, CONNECTICUT 06106-1591

**REPRESENTATIVE DAVID ALEXANDER**  
58TH ASSEMBLY DISTRICT

LEGISLATIVE OFFICE BUILDING  
ROOM 1001  
CAPITOL: (860) 240-8585  
TOLL FREE: (800) 842-8267  
FAX: (860) 240-0206  
E-MAIL: David.Alexander@cga.ct.gov

**MEMBER**  
PUBLIC HEALTH COMMITTEE  
TRANSPORTATION COMMITTEE  
VETERANS' AFFAIRS COMMITTEE

**Testimony in Support of HB6237**  
**Planning and Development Public Hearing**  
**March 1, 2013**

I first would like to thank Chairman Casano and Chairman Rojas, ranking members Senator Fasano and Representative Aman and the entire Planning and Development Committee for letting me testify today.

I come here to today to testify in support of HB 6237 "An Act Concerning A Referendum by Residents of the Thompsonville Fire District to Purchase Property Or Construct A New Fire Station." And also HB 6253 "An Act Authorizing Limited Liability Companies to Vote in Elections in the Thompsonville Fire District."

Before I begin my testimony today I would just like to mention that these two bills have nothing to do with the quality of service provided by the Thompsonville Fire Fighters. They are highly professional, and they are hard workers that deserve the best possible facility and equipment. In fact, I am indebted to all of the Enfield fire fighters who heroically put out a blazing fire last year next door to my uncles home. He would have likely lost his home without their efforts. Their grace under pressure on that day was incredible.

However, I have serious concerns with the decision by the three Thompsonville Fire District Commissioners' and Fire Chief's to move forward with purchasing Enfield town property to construct a new fire house without a referendum.

As background, Enfield is a town that has five independent fire districts. These districts function autonomously by five separate special acts charters enacted under the General Statutes. Four of the five fire districts in town have clauses in their charter that require a referendum to purchase property and construct a fire house if the district enters into a mortgage. The Thompsonville Fire District does not have such a clause.

Furthermore, the four other fire districts in Enfield all had referendums prior to building new fire houses. The Thompsonville Fire District Charter does not have such a clause requiring a referendum. However, in the past two years the Thompsonville Fire Commissioners brought forth two voter referendums to build a new fire house, and both were voted down. Now the Fire Commissioners, along with the Fire Chief, want to go forward anyways and build a new fire house without a referendum. Upon looking at their charter it does appear that the commissioners can legally go forward with construction of a new fire house. Yet this determination is still up for debate. However, just because something is legal does not make it morally correct. I feel that a referendum needs to be required in order to build a new Thompsonville fire house, and that is the purpose behind HB 6237.

HB 6237 would amend the Thompsonville Fire District charter, and there is a possibility this bill might not be Constitutional because the district itself might have to first ask the General Assembly to change their charter. I do not know the answer to this, and I respectfully defer to this committee's guidance upon this matter. However, I still

wanted to testify in support of this bill in order to shed light on the serious situation that has developed within the fire district.

Switching gears, HB 6253 would allow property owners who own property as an "LLC" to have one vote in Thompsonville Fire elections. Currently, property owners who own property in a "partnership" have one vote but not owners under an "LLC." Both "LLCs" and "partnerships" are forms of property co-ownership, and it does not make sense that one form of ownership is allowed and one disallowed. I personally think this is a purposeful attempt by the fire district to disenfranchise larger businesses within the district from having a say in district matters. A constituent of mine, Lori Longhi, submitted additional testimony regarding this bill.

As someone who knocked on over 11,000 doors throughout the 58th District during last year's campaign, I heard a lot of complaints from residents regarding the Thompsonville Fire District. Specifically, many residents were extremely upset that they pay a substantially higher fire tax rate than any other district in Enfield. Upon investigation, I learned that Thompsonville Fire District residents pay taxes at a mill rate of 6.60. This is incredibly higher than the four other districts in town. Enfield Fire District residents pay taxes at a 3.05 mill rate. Hazardville Fire District Residents pay taxes at a 2.10 mill rate. North Thompsonville Fire District residents pay taxes at a 2.90 mill rate, and Shaker Pines Fire District residents pay taxes at a 2.20 rate.

Thompsonville is a struggling working class community, and in my opinion, the biggest problem facing Thompsonville is the lack of homeownership within the neighborhood. I believe that homeownership within Thompsonville is seriously discouraged and hampered by the high rate of fire taxes. During my campaign many residents and business leaders within Thompsonville told me that this situation needs to be corrected in order for Thompsonville to improve.

Furthermore, I heard numerous complaints by residents regarding mismanagement within the Thompsonville Fire District and numerous other complaints regarding a lack of transparency regarding the manner in which the district conducts business. Many of these residents also came to me during my campaign with concerns regarding the proposed new Thompsonville Fire District station. Most of these people were not necessarily in favor or against the new station. Instead, they just wanted to vote via a referendum about whether to build a new fire station. Many of these residents also reminded me that the residents of the Thompsonville Fire District previously voted down two referendums regarding a new fire station.

HB 6237 would mandate that the fire district hold a referendum prior to building this proposed fire house. Personally, I am not in favor of or against building a new fire house. In fact, I do not live in the Thompsonville Fire District, but the district sits within the confines of the 58<sup>th</sup> Assembly District. However, I feel that the voters need to be heard and have a say in this decision. Let the voters vote. If they vote in favor of a new fire house then we should move forward with the proposal. If they vote it down then we need to respect their viewpoint. Either way, their voice must be heard.

Recently, the Hartford Courant published numerous articles regarding the Thompsonville Fire District. In these articles the Thompsonville Fire Chief has stated that the proposed construction plan would not increase taxes but instead is already itemized in their current budget. Upon further questioning the chief stated that the current budget is approximately \$4 million and that the proposed plan would be financed with approximately \$3 million from within their budget. I find this very suspect because this would mean that the district would be only operating on approximately \$1 million. As mentioned, the Thompsonville Fire District has an incredibly high tax rate, and most of their budget is funded through fire taxes. Thus, the Fire Chief's statement in this Hartford Courant article makes it appear that the bulk of Thompsonville fire taxes are not going towards fire protection, but instead most of the taxes are going towards funding a new fire house without any approval or oversight from the community.

A second Hartford Courant article explains how last week the chair of the Fire Commission, Roger Asbaugh, attempted to rescind his signature on the land purchase contract. Mr. Asbaugh claims that he was not properly given a page of the contract, and he asserts that the district is using money that was previously designated in a voter approved budget to make repairs to fund the new fire house. This further complicates this case and sheds light on the fact that fire district business is being conducted with no transparency.

A third Hartford Courant article was printed yesterday that explained the deplorable conditions of the current fire house. The article explains that starting in September of 2011 the Enfield Fire Marshall has continuously cited the fire commissioners for failing to keep the current facility up to code. Extensions were granted to allow the commissioners the opportunity to rectify the situation, but these extensions ran out at the end of February of this year. The matter is likely going to court, and the commissioners can be potentially fined or imprisoned. In every yearly budget the fire district budgeted \$200,000 for maintenance and repairs, money that was supposed to go to fixing the current horrific conditions. The Courant article alludes to the fact that the commissioners purposely did not use this money to renovate the facility, but they instead put it in a slush fund to pay for the proposed move. Meanwhile, the fire fighters had to continuously work in embarrassingly poor conditions, and the taxpayers' wishes were ignored.

As the State Representative for Thompsonville, I will not stand down until the voters have a say in this matter, and the taxpayers are given a fair shake. Thompsonville is a working class community where many residents live paycheck to paycheck. I personally know of many seniors in Thompsonville that live on incredibly tight fixed incomes. My uncle who I earlier mentioned is one of these seniors in this district, and he wants a referendum on this matter as well. The people of Thompsonville do not deserve to pay more than twice as much than anyone else due to mismanagement. They do not deserve back room deals and to be totally walled off from the governing process. They do not deserve a potential slush fund fueled by monies that were supposed to go to repairing their fire house. Instead, they deserve a say in this matter. They deserve for their voice to be heard. They deserve a referendum on the proposed new fire house so that they can rightfully take ownership of their district.

I thank the members of the committee again for allowing me to testify, and I will gladly answer any questions.