

**Michael R. Criss  
First Selectman  
Town of Harwinton  
Before the Planning & Development Committee  
February 1, 2013**

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on proposed bills to give towns relief from unfunded state mandates.

As First Selectman of Harwinton, I have been working to improve the efficiency of our local government and be more responsive to our residents and businesses. Like many towns, we are struggling to find ways to reduce municipal costs to address concerns with declining revenues and flat funding of state aid to municipalities.

Unfortunately, efforts to reduce costs are often undermined by state mandates that tie our hands in trying to control wage, health care, pension and education costs. We need more flexibility in addressing these issues, particularly given the ongoing budgetary issues facing the town and the state.

I therefore support the proposed bills before the committee today that will require any new mandate to be approved by a 2/3 majority of the legislature. This will provide greater opportunity for meaningful dialogue about the cost and benefits of any proposed state mandate.

In addition, I support **SB-143, HB-5530, and HB-5532**, which will allow municipalities to publish certain legal notices on municipal websites to achieve savings. We received feedback from several towns as to how much this would save them – Town of Harwinton over \$5,000 per year; Town of Goshen - \$6,147 per year; Town of Barkhamsted - over \$5,000 per year; Town of Norfolk - \$10,640.23 last year; and the Town of Kent - \$4,000 in unneeded advertising for a bridge project. Although this may not sound like big dollars, at this point, these savings are very helpful.

In addition to these measures, we urge the state to look for ways of addressing the big cost drivers in municipal budgets – prevailing wage requirements which can significantly to the cost of a local project and make it difficult for us to hire local contractors i.e. Harwinton EMS building cost 30% more to build with current wage requirements and thresholds – and binding arbitration reform to address salary and benefit costs that are swamping local education budgets.

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Thank you for the opportunity to comment. We appreciate that this committee is looking for ways to address the need to relief towns of unfunded mandates.

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