

**Testimony
Kathy Eagen
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Before the Planning & Development Committee
February 1, 2013**

MANDATE RELIEF PUBLIC HEARING

This is expected to be a very difficult budget year towns, particularly in view of the state's budget deficit and the impact that this may have on state aid to municipalities. Although we are making significant efforts to reduce costs, revenues have been flat or decreasing, putting us in the position of having to look for additional cuts or increase property taxes.

Unfortunately, state mandates, many of which are under-funded or unfunded, make it difficult to control costs in our budgets. I therefore support efforts to adopt the following mandate relief measures currently pending before the General Assembly:

Enacting a 2/3 Approval Requirement for Any Unfunded Mandate

Requiring any new unfunded mandates to be approved by a 2/3 vote of the General Assembly will ensure that lawmakers fully consider the cost implications associated with new mandates. Too often, the costs associated with a new mandate are not fully understood until the measure has been adopted. I therefore urge support for the numerous bills on the agenda which recognize that we must not enact any new mandates without full consideration of the costs and implications on our towns.

Relieving towns from the cost and burden associated with storing the personal possessions of evicted tenants

Connecticut law imposes the burden of storing the personal property of evicted tenants on the town, which is very costly and burdensome. The vast majority of states do not shift this burden to municipalities. I therefore urge support for **HB-5295 AN ACT CONCERNING THE POSSESSIONS OF EVICTED TENANTS**, which recognizes that towns should not bear the burden of storing possessions as a result of contractual agreements that they are not a party to.

Posting Legal Notices on the Internet

Posting legal notices on a town's website would be much more efficient. Increasingly, residents turn to the town's website for information on a wide range of issues, including legal notices. We should be able utilize technology to reduce costs associated with publishing legal notices in newspapers. I therefore urge support for **SB-143 - AN ACT CONCERNING THE PUBLICATION OF NOTICE IN NEWSPAPERS, HB-5530 - AN ACT PERMITTING THE POSTING OF LEGAL NOTICES ON MUNICIPAL WEB SITES, and HB-5532 - AN ACT CONCERNING THE PUBLICATION OF LEGAL NOTICES.**

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New School Reform Mandates

While recent school reforms are very well intentioned, they impose a number of costly mandates that we simply cannot afford at this time. We therefore urge support for proposals such as **HB-5438, AN ACT CONCERNING UNFUNDED MANDATES ON SCHOOLS AND MUNICIPALITIES**, which recognize that we must delay implementation of certain education reforms that are imposing time-consuming and costly burdens on our school system until federal or state funds are available to fund the programs.

In addition to the mandate relief measures on the public hearing agenda, I urge you to move forward with additional mandate relief issues to assist towns in controlling local budgets and taxes:

Municipal Employee Retirement Program – Pension and benefit costs are escalating, leaving towns with few options to control costs. The state mandated employee contribution rate should be increased to ensure that towns can fund pensions more equitably.

Minimum Budget Requirement (MBR) - The Minimum Budget Requirements makes it difficult to achieve any real cost savings because state law mandates that school budgets cannot be reduced below previous year spending levels. Towns need more flexibility to ensure that if cost savings are achieved or enrollment has declined, these savings can be used to reduce the education budget.

Binding Arbitration Reform – Towns need more control over local education budgets. Reforming the binding arbitration laws will help ensure that steep salary and benefit awards don't undermine a town's ability to provide critical services, including education, public safety and road repair. Towns should have the right to reject awards by a 2/3 vote of a town's legislative body. Lawmakers should also support efforts to protect a town's fund balance by ensuring that it is not considered for purposes of binding arbitration awards and require arbitrators to be certified.

Prevailing Wage - Prevailing wage laws have artificially driven up labor wages far beyond their market value. As a result, construction costs for local building projects have skyrocketed, slowing economic development and the construction of important projects. Increasing the prevailing thresholds would strike an equitable balance for workers, towns and taxpayers and be an important step that would reduce municipal costs, spur economic development and lighten the burden on taxpayers.

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