

**Testimony on**  
**Raised H.B. No. 6629 "An Act Concerning Regionalism in**  
**Connecticut"**

**Planning and Development Committee March 18, 2103**

**Mary A. Glassman, First Selectman of Simsbury and**  
**Chair of the Policy Board of the**  
**Capitol Region Council of Governments**

The Capitol Region Council of Governments serves 30 cities and towns around the Hartford Region. We serve a bit less than one quarter of the state's population. For more than 40 years the Council has sought out ways to better serve its members:

- **Purchasing.** About half of the cities and towns in the state belong to the regional purchasing council that has saved many millions of dollars for its members
- **Geographic information systems.** The region was the first to have a regional geographic information system to assist smaller communities get access to this service and larger communities to look at developments just over their borders
- **Public safety and homeland security.** For more than the past decade the region has worked on public safety, homeland security and disaster preparation and response services with mobile data display services and much more.
- **Web-based services.** CRCOG has spearheaded on online permitting system for 17 cities and towns that is a platform for many other shared services.

My remarks today are based on a policy statement approved by the CRCOG Policy Board on January 15 of this year. This brief paper is attached to my testimony and lays out what CRCOG would like to accomplish for our members by 2020.

As the statement says on page two, CRCOG's main interest in the regional boundaries discussion is "not to get bigger but [to have] a strong set of peer regional agencies with which to work."

We do not have a specific position on the exact number of regions, or an exact set of boundaries that should be adopted. We do believe that regions need to be of a size large enough to have the capacity to fully implement coming and complex federal

transportation funding requirements as well as to provide the capacity to support a much wider array of service sharing opportunities among towns from back office functions to shared tax assessment, to name only two.

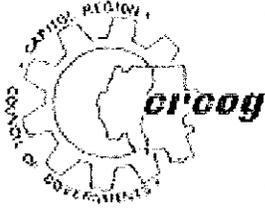
We suggest that the state will not be well served if, as just one example, we have more than 100 places answering emergency calls and with dozens of overlapping and uncoordinated service regions.

We do see enormous benefits of having chief elected officials come together in regions to address issues of regional concern. A recent example is the regional approach to solid waste management that was led by elected officials. This common table for discussion and action by elected officials is we believe very important.

There is much to be done to rationalize our state and local service system to get to the "right scale" that is both financially sustainable and effective. Developing a series of pilots in a methodical way to move this agenda forward makes a great deal of sense - whether the pilots in the bill - or another considered set. While much has been done in shared services, there are a myriad of possibilities that should be considered around potential savings or better services at similar cost.

In conclusion, we do not have detailed comments on each of the provisions of this 45 page bill to offer today but would say that if the bill evolves to produce a set of "right scale" regions with chief elected officials at the table that are able to act as a platform for future rationalization of the multiplicity of state service boundaries, to carry tasks such as transportation planning and project management, and support voluntary coordination of municipal shared services we believe this would be a major step forward.

Thank you.



## **CRCOG 2020: Goals, Pathway and Milestones**

(Adopted January 15, 2013)

The Capitol Region Council of Governments is a stable and sustainable organization with the capacity to serve its member towns and, as appropriate, to make services available to the state and to non-member towns. As the state of Connecticut, CRCOG, and its member towns look for new and cost effective methods of service delivery, CRCOG is poised to innovate and pilot new approaches to provide better value for taxpayers.

By 2020 CRCOG will have transformed its service offerings to member towns to offer:

- A Regional Service Center that will house a number of major public regional services (CRCOG, Capital Workforce, CREC, a public service center for state services and some state offices). A regional service center would also include state level offices that provide direct citizen and business facing services as well as house the public regional service agencies whose co-location would be designed to reduce overhead costs. Co-location would be designed to foster service integration for one-stop services (e.g. seniors needing a variety of services, or businesses operating in a number of towns).
- A Regional Back Office Services portfolio for towns and cities in finance, HR, asset management, GIS, web services back office, using broadband and jointly procured software programs or services.
- A variety of customer-supportive Regional Services: Online permitting, licensing, tax assessment and other services those are of high quality and value to towns and residents.

### **Regional Boundaries in Connecticut**

By 2014 the state will consider boundaries for the current 14 regional planning organizations in the state as provided in state statute. In this reshaping, CRCOG's interest is to have robust, viable partners as councils of governments to work cooperatively on metropolitan planning for transportation, on

cost effective and high quality public services at the "right scale" to best serve taxpayers, and to have sufficient capacity to respond to emerging issues that come along from time to time such as municipal solid waste management service procurement or other regional cooperative ventures.

By itself, CRCOG is a large region: its current boundaries include about 25% of the state's population (800,000 out of 3.5 million). As a result, CRCOG's main interest in the boundaries process is not get bigger but having a strong set of peer regional agencies with which to work.

It is in the citizens' best interests to have a limited number of regional planning organizations, each with sufficient resources on an on-going basis to provide services to its member communities and to develop innovative ways of addressing issues its members and the state face. Ideally these organizations would have the ability to create operations that are cost effective for taxpayers and have broad applicability and can be adopted by other regional organizations' and municipalities (as CRCOG has done with on-line permitting, CAPTAIN, and Purchasing Council). In terms of regions' boundaries, it's important that each region be sized and organized so that it is sensitive to the range of communities it includes, from small rural towns to central cities, but is large enough to be viable as an entity that can produce meaningful services.

It is hoped that arriving at a set of strong peer agency boundaries would not be a drawn out process. A number of regional boundaries in the state have five regions for the state: workforce board regions, tourism and homeland security. Some adjustment to this framework might be a sensible place to start on reshaping the boundaries of the regions in the state. The final set of boundaries should be in place for all three of these organizations as well as regional planning organizations. Any subgroup of service delivery should be a subset of the larger region, respecting the regional boundaries.

## **Conclusion**

The Capitol Region Council of Governments' goal is to maintain and build on its capacity to serve its member towns and, as appropriate, to make services available to the state and to non-member towns. CRCOG has pioneered a number of services from the broad scale cooperative purchasing to mobile data displays in

police vehicles to online building permitting.

As the capital district for Connecticut, CRCOG is open to being used in a greater way to pilot new approaches for improving services and pioneering innovative organizational arrangements (e.g. regional transit authority) in the coming years.

Responsive, cost effective government services can only become more important in the coming years with rising demand and limited resources. CRCOG is dedicated to working with its member communities to meet these needs.

