February Session 2014 – Hearing March 21, 2014

RE: Bill No. 5541 – An Act concerning the Thompsonville Fire District

To the Committee on Planning and Development, St of CT, LOB

My name is Erline Provencher. I am a resident of Enfield and have been a taxpayer of the Thompsonville Fire District (TFD) for over 40 years.

I have two married daughters, one of whom lives in this Fire District, and I am proud grandmother of three grandsons.

I have been a widow for 12 years. I have been retired from Stanadyne Corporation for 7. After my husband died, I lived on one income, and for the past seven I have lived on a fixed income. Living on a fixed income has its challenges. One of the challenges is the ability to control how and where my money is spent.

I was excited to hear that our State Representative was bringing forth a bill to regain our right to vote on the annual budget in the TFD. However, because other interest groups got involved with this proposed bill **I cannot ask for your support to pass Bill 5541 as amended and written.**

- To allow TFD voters to vote by referendum at the Annual Budget:

YES, ALLOW US TO VOTE, however, NO where it states a vote by referendum only if the proposed budget is over 3% from prior year's budget

As a taxpayer of the TFD, I lost my right to vote at the May 2013 annual meeting when two of our three commissioners voted not to allow the residents to vote on the annual budget. Their reason, as brought out by testimony in Court, was an attorney's interpretation of the 2009 Amendment to the Special Act (09-05) of 1935, and an excessive explanation of a need for a new firehouse.

The 2009 amendment to the Fire District's Charter provides as follows:

"(b) the following shall be electors of the district
(1) Any person residing within the limits of the district and qualified to vote in the affairs of the town of Enfield and (2) any citizen of the United States of the age of eighteen, or more, who is liable to the district for taxes assessed against such citizen. ***Electors may vote on any matter or question of an annual meeting or special meeting of the district."****(emphasis added)*

In our defense, our Attorney, Ryan McKeen, entered what Representative Sharkey said when he introduced the 2009 Amendment. His remarks are as follows:

"....this is a bill that establishes a new voting requirement for the Thompsonville Fire District. It allows any person who owns property within the district who is otherwise able to vote, ***to be able to vote on any Fire District issues that may come up before the District.*** *" (emphasis added)*

It was mainly due to the interpretation of the word "may" our vote by referendum *ended after over 35 years of voting. In the proposed Bill (5541) being brought* forth to you today this wording remains. As follows, See [(b)] (c) ...."Electors may vote on any matter or question at an annual or special meeting of the district".

I highly suggest this wording be amended by replacing with the revised amendment (b) of the Bill however, I ask that you do not support the stipulation of a vote only if there is an increase over last year's budget.

There is no need for this stipulation. For the past 35 years the annual budget was voted by referendum, only being voted down once due to a line item issue. This was corrected, and at the next special meeting, this budget was approved. Taxpayers did recently vote down two attempts for a firehouse, as both would have created an increase in the fire tax mill rate. The annual budget we did not vote on included a line item for a new firehouse, and the foundation has since been poured.

The TFD has the highest tax mill rate in the town. Taxpayers are legally responsible to pay the mill rate set by the Fire Commissioner's Board. Our vote controls the fire district mill rate. It also controls the line items in the budget. Prior voting allowed us to have a voice in the entire budget. With this stipulation, we have limited say on the future of the fire tax mill rate, or control over the budget's line items.

My husband was a volunteer fireman for the TFD. I am aware of the dangers of a firemen's job and how vital training and safety equipment is to their profession. A safety issue with the firefighters is a safety issue to me. Safety concerns have not been jeopardized.

Many Fire Taxation Districts in the State of Connecticut provide for resident representation in the affairs of those districts. Just recently, the Somers Fire Department received bids for a new tanker truck. This new truck was overwhelmingly approved by the voters of the town by a two to one margin. Does one think Enfield is any different? I am proud of our firefighters and will do my utmost to protect and support them as I expect for them to protect and support me.

Our Country was born on democracy – what would our forefathers, who fought and died for our freedom say if they heard our vote was taken away but may come back only with stipulations?

We are here to get our vote back, a vote that we had for over 35 years, an unfettered vote, a full vote without stipulations.

Let America know that our voice was heard in this Legislature. Please support us by allowing us to vote freely.

- To increase the number of commissioners from three to five:

YES, increase the number of commissioners from three to five, however NO to the commissioners immediately serving a three year term. What this bill does not indicate is that one of the original three commissioners is ending his three year term this May 2014. To leave this bill as amended and written, will leave 3 out of 5 commissioners ending their 3 year term together.

Currently as Amended and written:

Current Commissioner	Term End May 2015
Current Commissioner	Term End May 2016
Original Commissioner	Term End May 2017
Proposed Commissioner	Term End May 2017
Proposed Commissioner	Term End May 2017

These two new commissioners need to be staggered. One should have a two (2) year term, the other a three (3) year term. Thereafter shall be elected to serve a three year term.

Current Commissioner	Term End May 2015
Proposed Commissioner	Term End May 2016
Current Commissioner	Term End May 2016
Proposed Commissioner	Term End May 2017
Current Commissioner	Term End May 2017

Thank you for allowing me to provide this testimony.

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