

March 21, 2014

HB 5541 Planning and Development Committee Hearing.

Dear Chairman and Committee Members:

My name is Steve Cogtella, a retired resident of the Thompsonville fire district. I was, and still am a union member for over 30 years with ATU local 448 in Springfield Ma. Fifteen of those years I served in the capacity of Vice President and/or Executive Board member. I've participated in the negotiation of at least 6 contracts, did scores of grievances, mediations, and been involved in numerous arbitrations, one being my own.

I believe in unions, and strong aggressive leadership to bring the brothers and sisters of those unions to the levels they deserve. Strong leadership is how that happens along with support from the rank and file, and that has happened with the Thompsonville firefighters. It also required the continued support and funding by the District taxpayers for at least 35 years of voting on the budget.

We have recognizance and appreciated the dedicated service of the firefighters which is evident from the wages, benefits, safety and security afforded in their collective bargaining agreement. I believe strong union leadership has an obligation to strive for continued improvement through every possible avenue, much like we have before us today. However, strong leadership also has to be aware of how the pursuit of these other avenues affect others.

I recently asked one of the union leaders why the union and advocacy groups in concert with them are pursuing this three percent. I was told that it would be a "dereliction of duty" if he and the others didn't pursue this. I disagree, It is a "dereliction of duty" when the union and others fail to see the big picture. Savvy Union

leaders need to be cognizant of any actions they undertake, and the consequence of those actions on others. This is especially true in this case, where this self serving 3 percent, benefits so few and negatively impacts so many. Not exactly union philosophy.

A Thompsonville union firefighter has everything and more one could strive for in this economy. Good wages, benefits, job security and safety, that is realistically possible to achieve through collective bargaining. To now take more than they need using the legislative process is unconscionable. The added burden this will create on the District taxpayers that have proven their support, now lose their security and safety, especially the 19 percent, whose homes are owner occupied many on fixed incomes. We just cant afford it anymore. We are not living comfortably, we are living adequately. There comes a point in time, like we have before us today, where savvy union leadership and those supporting them need to take a step back. It is this type of unjustified conduct that destroys a community and working relationship with a union. The taxpayers of the District have proven themselves for over thirty five years of having the ability to be the final check and balance of the budget, and rightfully should be, its our money. I ask you today to support a revision of this bill that reinstates our vote, **unconditionally.**

Thank you,



Stephen Cogtella, owner 2 South River Street, Enfield, Ct. 06082