



**Testimony
Richard Smith
First Selectman, Town of Deep River
Connecticut Council of Small Towns
Before the Public Safety & Security Committee
March 4, 2014**

Good afternoon. My name is Dick Smith, First Selectman of the Town of Deep River and President of the Connecticut Council of Small Towns (COST).

COST strongly supports HB-5391 - AN ACT CONCERNING OVERTIME AND FRINGE BENEFITS OF RESIDENT STATE TROOPERS, which reduces the municipal contribution rate for overtime and fringe benefit costs from 100% to 70% to maintain the viability of the Resident State Trooper program. This is one of our top priorities this session and we thank you for raising this bill.

The Resident State Trooper program has been in place for more than 60 years. Over the years, more and more small towns have chosen to utilize resident state troopers to provide greater public safety protection for their citizens.

In 2011, the state legislature *increased* from 70% to 100% the amount towns are required to reimburse the state for Resident State Trooper overtime costs. This shifted a considerable burden onto Connecticut's small towns at a time when state aid to municipalities has been largely flat funded and the cost of providing critical services, such as education, continues to increase.

Unfortunately, the costs associated with the Resident State Trooper program have increased dramatically over the last few years due, in large part, to increases in fringe benefit rates. Each year, towns are notified about changes in the fringe benefit rate long after local budgets have been adopted.

In FY 2009/10, the fringe benefit rate was approximately 59%. This year, towns were notified that the fringe benefit rate was increased from 72.95% to 83.85%, effective July 1. For some towns, this is more than double the fringe benefit rate established for municipal employees. Although towns anticipated some increase in costs due to changes in wage rates, many towns are now faced with budget shortfalls due to the dramatic increase in fringe benefit costs.

Towns also question how the fringe benefit rate is calculated and whether it is fair to require towns to pick up certain costs. It is our understanding that the new fringe benefit rate includes an increase to cover pension costs for the entire state police department, which unfairly penalizes Resident State Trooper towns.



For over 60 years, the Resident State Trooper program has been a strong state-local partnership, critical to protecting the public safety of our citizens and businesses. Continuing to shift more of the costs for public safety onto the backs of local property taxpayers compromises this partnership, undermining the integrity of the program.

If towns are forced to abandon the Resident State Trooper program, the state must shoulder 100% of the costs associated with providing public safety coverage in these areas. Under those circumstances, everyone loses.

The Resident State Trooper program - if local costs are reined in - is a win-win for both the state and local communities.

Given the focus on encouraging towns to regionalize programs and share services to increase efficiency and reduce costs, it is important to remember that the Resident State Trooper program is an excellent example of a regional program that does just that. It allows towns to enter into a partnership with the state to provide critical public safety services for residents and businesses in the most efficient way possible.

COST urges lawmakers to **support HB-5391**, which will ensure that the Resident State Trooper program remains strong and viable to enhance public safety in our communities.