



**Testimony
Betsy Gara
Executive Director
Connecticut Council of Small Towns
Before the
Public Safety & Security Committee
March 11, 2014**

**Re: SUPPORT – SB-426, AN ACT SUSPENDING AND EVALUATING THE
CONSOLIDATION OF DISPATCH CENTERS WITHIN THE DIVISION OF STATE
POLICE**

The Connecticut Council of Small Towns (COST) *supports* SB-426, which suspends the consolidation of dispatch centers within the Division of State Police pending an evaluation of the consolidation efforts.

Thank you for responding to COST's concerns regarding this issue and raising a bill to suspend the consolidation. As discussed, the state Department of Emergency Services and Public Protection (DESPP) is moving forward with plans to reduce the number of state police dispatch centers in the state from 12 to 5. In the western part of the state, dispatch functions for Troops A and B were moved to Troop L in Litchfield. Earlier this year, state police dispatchers from Troops D in Danielson, K in Colchester and E in Montville were moved to a consolidated dispatch center at Troop C in Tolland. The consolidation, intended as a cost-savings measure, drew widespread criticism from Windham County residents and town officials. The following concerns have been noted in the press and by local officials:

Locked doors

As part of the move in September, the trooper who had been manning the front desk was initially reassigned as a "local patrol officer" and sent out on the road, a move that left the barracks locked for much of the day and night shifts. An exterior phone, linked to Tolland, was required to gain entry. Residents stopping at the barracks reported long wait times for non-emergency matters, including being fingerprinted, reporting crimes or filling out accident reports.

Response Times

In Killingly, local officials have stated that they are hearing from troopers that response times are up and that people are waiting at the barracks for 10, 15 or 20 minutes for someone. It reportedly took state police 90 minutes to respond to a Windham home invasion in which two teens locked themselves in a bathroom for safety. There was also an incident when it took a trooper from Troop D in Danielson 41 minutes to respond to an active domestic incident because he was



dispatched to Highland Road instead of Highland Drive. Response times have suffered due to lack of experience and knowledge of the area and because there are now call-takers relaying information to dispatchers instead of immediately dispatching services. In addition, troopers are now leaving to transport prisoners to prisons in Montville and Niantic because there is no one at the barracks to watch over them. Purportedly, a small number of dispatchers have been required to work multiple double shifts to meet call demand.

In addition, state police consolidated the dispatch centers of barracks in Litchfield, Southbury and Canaan in northwestern Connecticut into one center in Litchfield. Each center had one dispatcher and one trooper around the clock. Now, the Litchfield center has three dispatchers and one trooper around the clock, resulting in a decrease of two troopers answering the phones per shift. Reassigning troopers who are familiar with the community and geographic area also creates concerns that response times may be negatively impacted.

In response to concerns, there have been some adjustments made. After reviewing the number of walk-in "customers," the troop commander decided to reopen the doors of Troop D during the day and assign a trooper to be inside the barracks whenever possible. A buzzer system was installed in the barracks' lobby, letting troopers know when a resident required help.

No Documented Cost Savings

Although consolidation has been touted as a cost savings measure, it has been difficult to quantify the cost savings and many local officials have suggested that the costs have increased.

COST recommends that the evaluation required pursuant to SB-426 includes an assessment of:

- 1) The impact of consolidation on emergency response times;
- 2) How prisoner transport can be accomplished without locking entry to centers;
- 3) How the state will engage municipal officials as partners in decisions about changes in staffing and consolidation; and
- 4) A cost-benefit analysis to determine whether consolidation will result in costs/savings and the overall impact on public safety in the community.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment in support of SB-426.