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**Testimony of Representative Flexer to the
Public Safety Committee
March 11, 2014**

Good Morning Representative Dargan, Representative Giegler, Senator Hartley, Senator Guglielmo, and members of the Public Safety and Security Committee. Thank you for the opportunity to testify in support of Senate Bill 426, *An Act Suspending and Evaluating the Consolidation of Dispatch Centers Within the Division of State Police*.

I am here today to voice my strong opposition to the continued consolidation of State Police Dispatch Centers across the state, but with emphasis on this issue as it relates to the relocation of the dispatch center utilized by Troop D in Danielson, Connecticut. I am asking the committee to reverse consolidation.

Last year, dispatchers were moved from stations in not only Danielson, but from Colchester and Montville as well; into the main dispatch center in Tolland. Not only has this consolidation increased wait times for non-emergency services, such as fingerprinting, or the reporting of crimes and accidents, but it has, dangerously, increased the response times in cases of emergency calls.

Troop D functions as a local police department to multiple towns, only one town in Windham County, Plainfield, is fully covered by a local police department and two towns, Putnam and Windham, which is covered by troop K, have departments that cover the central portions of their communities but not the entire town. Since shifting the main dispatch center to Troop C in Tolland, the people now in charge of dispatching state police to Danielson and surrounding areas are geographically unfamiliar with the region, and in turn, cannot direct officers to certain areas in the most efficient manner, either distance or time-wise.

In the months since consolidated dispatch has been rolled out in eastern Connecticut there have been numerous serious incidents where state police response was either delayed or simply unavailable. At Troop D alone those incidents have ranged from the inability to report a road rage incident to a sexual assault being unreported. These incidents have largely occurred because the Troop D barracks are now only accessible to the public between the hours of 9 a.m. and 5 p.m. Troop D, like many police departments, is viewed to be a safe haven, a place to go in an emergency. Since dispatch was consolidated last fall, the barracks is hardly open outside these hours. There has been an effort to improve access outside these hours but it simply isn't working. I have personally stopped by Troop D more than a dozen times outside of normal business hours and have only found the doors to the barracks to be open once.

On January 20th, 2014, there was a home invasion in Windham. Inside the house were two children, who upon hearing someone trying to get inside, locked themselves in a bathroom, and as children are instructed to do from an early age, they called 911. The family in question resides only minutes from a police station, but due to their location, state troopers are in charge of responding to area 911 calls. The officers arrived an hour and a half later. Upon the arrival of the police, the responding officers were "disturbed" at the amount of time that had gone by between the initial 911 call and when they were asked to respond to the home invasion. If the dispatch centers had not been consolidated, officers could have been informed of the situation, and deployed to the home in a timely manner, not only possibly catching the thieves in the act, but more importantly, ensuring the safety of the two children trapped inside of their own home.

Another issue with the shifting of the location of Troop D dispatch to Troop C in Tolland is that Troop D is no longer considered to be a 24-hour force by many residents of northeastern Connecticut. Due to Troop D acting as a local police force for Killingly and other area towns, this puts the citizens of these towns at an immediate disadvantage in comparison to others. Whereas other towns will have an almost immediate response time, the people of northeastern Connecticut will regularly have to wait for someone not familiar with the area to send help, which could easily result in a response time would be completely unacceptable for an emergency situation.

State Police officials claim this move has made overall operations more efficient, and even keeps troopers and civilians safer, all while the state police union says otherwise. Response times have increased anywhere from 10-20 minutes, and union officials have not wavered from their position that not only is this system less than efficient, but that it consistently puts lives at risk, particularly in the area served by Troop D. I have heard this first hand from numerous troopers that work in eastern Connecticut.

This bill should effectively erase the changes made as of July 1st, 2013, and revert to the extremely functional system that had been in place for decades before, allowing for dispatchers familiar with the area to be in charge of sending out troopers on calls, resulting in shorter response times, an increase in the level of overall safety, and possibly most important: peace of mind for the citizens of northeastern Connecticut, knowing that if they found themselves in an emergency situation, they would be attended to and taken care of within a reasonable and timely fashion.

While I have been hopeful that the Department of Emergency Services and Public Protection would reconsider the consolidation of state police dispatch services, I do not believe the legislature can wait any longer for the department to take action. This legislation is critical to continuing the mission to keep our constituents safe, and your action on suspending and reversing consolidation will guarantee their protection. Thank you again for the opportunity to testify today.