Arleen Yacobacci
10 Lombardi Drive
Derby, CT 06418

ayacobacci@yahoo.com

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RE: H.B. 6824 An Act Concerning the State Budget for the Biennium ending June Thirtieth 2017 And Making Appropriations Therefor and Other Provisions Related to Revenue

Madam Chair and members of the Appropriations Committee:

I thank you for the opportunity to express my concern for state budget cuts being proposed which will cut funding to the regional fire training schools. Any cuts in funding will, in turn, have a detrimental effect on local municipal budgets. I know you have a daunting task ahead of you in balancing a budget that we are now learning that calculation errors of almost $60 million are making that budget even smaller than originally anticipated. I am here as a volunteer member of Ansonia Fire Department Co. #3 to show my support for the regional fire schools. I am a relative newcomer to the department and completed my Firefighter 1 and Firefighter 2 certifications in 2014 with the Valley Fire Chiefs Regional Training School. I am fully aware how vital firefighter training is to keeping our community safe as well as ourselves. The classroom and practical training I received from the highly qualified instructors was invaluable. Training doesn't stop when you are certified. It is a continuous learning experience. Firefighters must consistently keep practicing their skills and techniques. Training with fellow firefighters is a team effort and is necessary to provide effective and efficient service to the community.

In Governor Malloy's budget address on February 18, 2015, he stated "Connecticut must keep its promise to cities and towns. This budget continues to fund municipal aid so that we can hold down local property taxes, and so that no teacher, no policeman, and no fireman will be laid off because state government failed to do its part". According to the National Fire Protection Association's "U.S. Fire Department Profile" issued November 2014 (authored by Hylton J.G. Haynes and Gary P. Stein), of the approximately 1,140,750 local firefighters in the United States, only 31% are career and 69% are volunteers. To put it more in perspective, of the estimated 30,052 fire departments in the U.S., 19.3% (5,797) were mostly volunteer while a whopping 65.9% (19,807) were all volunteer. With the majority of firefighters being volunteers, most towns do not have the financial obligation of funding salaries, however, the towns, with assistance from the state, do have the obligation of providing the training and tools necessary to keep their communities safe. If the funding is cut to the regional fire training schools then this ultimately increases the costs borne by the towns in the way of increased course tuition costs, usage fees and operating costs. Furthermore, Governor Malloy states that he "will not sign a budget that is balanced on the backs of our towns or our public schools" in his budget address. But in reality, the increased costs necessary to operate the regional training schools will be shouldered on the backs of the towns and cities.

Municipal budgets are already strained. In turn, fire department budgets have been drastically cut so any further decrease in funding to municipalities will be detrimental to community safety as well as firefighter safety. There are specified usage guidelines for equipment and gear after which time they need to be retired from service. Any further costs that need to be passed on to the municipalities because of state budget cost cuts, will compromise having well-trained and well-equipped firefighters. I want to read the Mission Statement of the Department of Emergency Services and Public Protection as it relates to Fire Prevention and Control. "The mission of this division is to prevent or mitigate the effects of fire and disasters through leadership and collaboration with municipalities, fire departments and regional fire schools. This is achieved through training, education and professional competency certification of career and volunteer fire service personnel." Fire training is the key to carrying out this mission. Please keep in mind that with good decision-making comes with education combined with effective and consistent training.

On January 6, 2014, there was a fire in Shelton that leveled a four-story building that included several businesses and apartments where almost 30 tenants were rescued from the building. Volunteer firefighters were called in from surrounding towns, including Ansonia, to help battle the blaze. Upon Governor Malloy's visit to announce help for displaced tenants and businesses he commended the firefighters since he himself comes "from a family of firefighters" and that he knows "the fear and worry that accompanies this profession. Our gratitude goes to you all of you who have this calling". (published New Haven Register, by Patricia Villers, 1/25/14) Please keep in mind these were all volunteers that came out and put their lives on the line, please allow us the training to continue to answer our calling of serving our communities. Please keep the funding in place so that the regional fire schools are allowed to operate safely and allow us to train. Let's keep our communities safe.