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Chairwoman Bye, Chairwoman Walker, Honorable Members of this Appropriations Committee, I testify today opposing defunding Connecticut's Regional Fire Schools as proposed in House Bill 6824 as Assistant Chief in charge of Training for the Fairfield Fire Department with a duty to train the fire fighters who protect the community we serve; as Training Director of the Fairfield Regional Fire School charged with meeting the needs of all first responders and public servants from across the state who utilize our Regional School; as Chairman of the Fire Emergency Support Function for Region 1 of the Department of Emergency Management and Homeland Security with the responsibility of ensuring interoperability between agencies and municipalities in emergency responses throughout Region 1; and as a member of the Fairfield Hazardous Incident Response Team responding for the past quarter century to chemical suicides, caches of combustibles in residential areas, conflagrations involving vast quantities of hazardous materials, and potential terrorist threats. Whatever hat I wear, whichever agency I represent, whether as Training Chief or ESF Chair, Training Director or Haz-Mat Responder, my message is the same: Connecticut's fire service cannot afford to lose its Regional Fire Schools.

Career and volunteer departments alike benefit from this state's current partial reimbursement of basic firefighter training costs, yet instead of doubling it as has been suggested in recent years it's been cut entirely from the proposed budget, leaving local municipalities to pick up the full tab on another unfunded mandate for their protective services. Whether local departments send their Fire Fighter I and II candidates to the Fairfield Fire School or my department sends personnel to another Regional School to take a certification class, if you endorse the Governor's proposed cut the entire cost of that training must be borne either by local budgets or those individuals who volunteer their services, resulting in higher property taxes or lower volunteer recruitment throughout Connecticut for both the immediate and foreseeable future.

Regional schools such as ours down in Fairfield provide both classrooms and practical training facilities to Fire, Police, EMS, Public Health, Public Works, Emergency Management & Homeland Security, Haz-Mat & SWAT Teams, Departments and public servants throughout every part of the state, yet the cuts currently on the table would put most of us out of business. Our ability to operate on nights and weekends when volunteer departments and career firefighters often need our resources most would be virtually eliminated; our available funding to develop training programs in an ever-changing world of hazards would be deeply reduced; our



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already crumbling facilities awaiting promised bonding and repairs would deteriorate beyond repair in the absence of state funding.

There are several painful ironies to these proposed funding cuts: the actual reductions, while a tiny fraction of the deficit this body seeks to remedy, represent debilitating percentages of lost funding to the fire service; the very regionalism touted as essential to more responsible fiscal management is nullified by these resources being diminished or closed; and the new initiatives in transportation, whether by road, rail or waterway, require the trained and seasoned interaction between fire, police, medical and public works which almost exclusively takes place at Connecticut's Regional Fire Schools, whether in Traffic Incident Management, Unified Command, Search & Rescue or countless other ongoing training programs.

The need to fund Connecticut's Regional Fire Schools was first recognized by this body almost half a century ago and signed into law by Governor Thomas Meskill; every Governor since, including Ella Grasso, William O'Neill, Lowell Weicker, John Rowland, and Jody Rell maintained or increased that funding during their tenure. Please consider these serious concerns and their potential long-term effects – please listen to the needs of my brother and sister fire fighters, our local departments and the communities they serve, and our state's Regional Fire Schools – and please, please, reject these proposed cuts to the very marrow of Connecticut's fire service.