

**Town of Barkhamsted
Incorporated 1779**

**Testimony of Donald S. Stein
First Selectman, Town of Barkhamsted
Chairman, Northwest Hills Council of Governments**

Connecticut General Appropriations Committee

REGARDING: GOVERNOR'S BILL 6824 - AN ACT CONCERNING THE STATE BUDGET FOR THE BIENNIUM ENDING JUNE THIRTIETH 2017, AND MAKING APPROPRIATIONS THEREFOR AND OTHER PROVISIONS RELATED TO REVENUE.

February 25, 2015

Good evening, Chairman Bye, Chairman Walker, Senator Kane and Representative Ziobron, my name is Donald Stein, and I'm the First Selectman of the Town of Barkhamsted and the current Chairman of the Northwest Hills Council of Governments, which was formed by the merger of the Litchfield Hills Council of Elected Officials and the Northwestern Connecticut Council of Governments. We are comprised of 21 communities in the northwest corner of Connecticut, most of which have populations of less than 10,000. The smallest of our members has a population of 1200 and the majority of the member towns have less than 5,000 residents.

The Northwest Hills COG and its members rely heavily on the use of Resident Troopers for the police function in their communities. In addition, they must employ a Trooper in order to have constables who can then provide additional police support. The proposed cost increase, which would force the Towns to pay 100% of the cost of a Resident Trooper is in reality a 50% increase in annual cost to the town and may force many towns to give up this very important function. Another distinct possibility is that towns that employ multiple Troopers are likely to reduce the number that they employ.

Using Barkhamsted as an example, we have had a Resident Trooper for over 20 years and it has provided a great deal of benefit. However, there are many residents who already question the cost of the Trooper to the town. We also used this program to hire a constable, who is the School Resource Office for Northwestern Regional High School #7.

The cost of our Resident Trooper today is about 6% of our \$2 million General Government budget. The 50% increase in cost from approximately \$125,000 today to \$180,000, and the associated tax increase, may be enough to cause elimination of the position by the Town Meeting vote on the budget. If that occurs, we would also lose the SRO program, which has been a very successful addition to our High School.

I very much appreciate Governor Malloy's efforts to keep towns whole in this extremely difficult budget year and I recognize that the proposed State budget recognizes that town budgets are already stretched thin.

However, requiring small towns to pick up 100% of the cost of the Resident Trooper program has the potential to undermine public safety in our smaller communities, and if the Towns do retain their Resident Trooper, it will definitely force an increase in property taxes.

**67 Ripley Hill Road, Pleasant Valley, CT 06063
(860) 379-8285; fax (860) 379-6262
dstein@barkhamsted.us**

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It is unfortunate that at the same time the state is encouraging towns to form regional partnerships to achieve savings, it is undermining what has been a successful regional program that allows the state and the towns to share responsibility for providing critical public safety services. One of the most logical reasons for the current cost sharing is that the Resident Trooper still works for the State Police and is frequently called to provide support outside the Town's borders.

Costs for the program have increased significantly since 2011. Rather than shifting more of the burden onto small towns, the state should try to help maintain the Resident State Trooper program by reining in costs associated with fringe benefits.

What's also troubling is that the state may not save any money by shifting these additional costs onto the towns. If towns abandon their Resident Trooper program or reduce the number of Troopers in their town, the state will be responsible for 100% of the cost of providing public safety coverage in those areas. The net affect of this change may actually end up costing the State more money and negate the projected savings.

Thank you for your consideration.