

Special Meeting with Appropriations Committee
March 20, 2015

Elizabeth C. Paterson (Mayor)
Town of Mansfield

I appreciate the opportunity to speak with you today on two issues that are very important to my community of Mansfield - the payment in lieu of taxes program (PILOT) for state-owned property and the resident state trooper program.

Mansfield is home to the University of Connecticut's main campus in Storrs, with a total population of 26,543 and a year-round population closer to 13,000. Outside of the university, we are still in many ways a rural community with a limited tax base consisting of residential and some commercial properties. With state support, we are building the mixed-use Storrs Center project to serve as our downtown, and this initiative has positively impacted our grand list.

It is very important for the state to adequately fund and to stabilize the PILOT grant for those towns that host a significant amount of state property. With the presence of UCONN and the former Bergin Correctional Institute, Mansfield is very reliant on the PILOT grant, receiving approximately \$7.65 million in FY 2014/15 under this program. Mansfield is unique in that the value of state-owned property, at approximately \$1.2 billion, actually exceeds the value of private property in town (our most recent grand list totals approximately \$1 billion).

Under statute, Mansfield should be receiving 45% on the assessed value of state property. The actual grant amount is closer to 24% of that figure for FY 2014/15 and is expected to decline to 22% for FY 2015/16. Mansfield's PILOT grant has fluctuated over the past 10 years and has not approached the statutory calculation of 45% of assessed value. Please make no mistake; state property certainly has an impact on the host municipality. While UCONN offers many benefits to Mansfield in terms of employment, arts and culture and other university-related amenities, it also has a real impact on our municipal services, including code enforcement, community services, education, public safety and public works. To illustrate this point, I have highlighted below several municipal services that are impacted by the presence of the university:

- ***Fire department/EMS*** – Mansfield maintains a combination fire department with both volunteer and paid personnel. Most towns our size in Connecticut rely on a volunteer fire department with a separate EMS provider. Mansfield employs 13 full-time and 14 part-time firefighter/EMT's that respond to 1,400-1,500 calls per year, most of which are rescue or ambulance calls. If Mansfield did not host the university, with its commuting traffic and associated rental properties, our annual call volume would be much lower. Mansfield's budget for Fire and Emergency Services totals \$2,013,632 per year.
- ***Housing inspection program*** – Mansfield is home to approximately 1,782 rental units, the vast majority of which house tenants that are students or have a university affiliation. In order to ensure that this housing stock meets minimum safety and related standards, the town maintains a housing inspection program to license residential rental properties. Our program is very comprehensive for a small town our size, and includes the enforcement of litter and certain parking regulations. The budget for this program totals approximately \$113,000 per year.

- **Police services** – Mansfield employs the services of 10 resident state troopers, the largest contingent of resident troopers in the state. Much of the work of the trooper’s office in Mansfield involves community policing in the neighborhoods adjacent to campus and responding to large off-campus parties and events such as the former UCONN Spring Weekend. Our budget for police services totals \$1,374,220. By contrast, the town of Tolland, our neighbor to the north with a year-round population similar to Mansfield’s, employs five resident troopers.
- **Road maintenance and construction** – The increased automobile and truck traffic on Mansfield roads results in a much higher annual maintenance cost for our municipal roads that carry much of the UCONN traffic. To withstand the additional traffic, these roads must be resurfaced at a higher frequency than other roads in town. Additionally, Mansfield has had to spend money on traffic calming measures on local neighborhood roads that serve as cut-through roads to the campus. The town spends thousands of dollars every year repairing vandalism on its roads near the campus and picking up litter in the off campus student-dominated neighborhoods. Mansfield provides a much higher level of service during the winter on local roads that feed the campus on event nights. Considerable extra dollars are spent by the town plowing and treating roads so that UCONN visitors will be able to get to and from winter events safely. The recently constructed roads in the new Storrs Center downtown development along the eastern edge of the campus are local roads, funded in part by Mansfield. Mansfield has paid hundreds of thousands of dollars to relocate and modernize some of UCONN’s water pipes in this area.
- **Walkways** – Also to provide for student (and driver) safety, Mansfield has had to construct walkways on Town roads near and adjacent to the UCONN campus. More walkways are needed near the campus for safety. Well over \$1,000,000 of Town funds (not grants) have been appropriated for these walkways.

I ask that you support legislation designed to adequately fund and to stabilize the PILOT grant for municipalities that are the most significantly impacted by state property. A town like Mansfield is not going to be able to grow its grand list to a size that will adequately fund the service demands associated with a major state institution such as UCONN. As you well know, over the past two decades the state has invested billions into UCONN and it is now one of the nation’s premier public institutions. In order for the state to maximize the investment that it has made in our community, it is important to ensure that the town receives an adequate and stable PILOT grant from the state.

I will now move to the Governor’s proposal to increase the reimbursement rate for the resident state trooper program from 70% to 100% of applicable costs. This would have a significant impact on the Town of Mansfield and would increase our costs by approximately \$500,000.

The resident trooper program certainly provides a valuable service for many of Connecticut’s smaller communities. With one sergeant and nine troopers, Mansfield has the largest contingent of resident troopers in the state. We are very fortunate to have several dedicated and talented troopers working here in Mansfield and within Troop C and the Eastern District.

Like my colleagues around the state, I am concerned about this proposal and its impact on the town’s operating budget. A figure of \$500,000 represents half a mill in Mansfield, and would not be easy to absorb. Therefore, the town could very well be in the position of having to reduce the number of troopers assigned to Mansfield or to go out to bid for police services. This would run counter to a police services study we completed in 2012, which recommended that the town increase its contingent of troopers from 10 to 13, recognizing the resident trooper program as the most cost effective and efficient alternative we reviewed at that time. If this provision passes, the

resident trooper program would lose much of its competitiveness, especially for municipalities that have other service alternatives.

The resident trooper program is one of the few successful service sharing arrangements we have in Connecticut, and allows both the state and its participating municipalities to benefit from an economy of scale. The present 70% reimbursement rate is fair because resident troopers respond to calls elsewhere with their troop's jurisdiction, providing real benefits to neighboring towns that may not have the financial capacity to hire their own troopers. If participating municipalities reduce the number of troopers assigned to their towns, the state will lose revenue, response times will increase and service will decline overall.

Consequently, I encourage the committee to take a hard look at this issue and to reject any increase in the reimbursement rate for the resident state trooper program.

I appreciate the opportunity to speak with you today on both the PILOT and the resident state trooper program and am happy to answer any questions you may have.