

**Town of Barkhamsted
Incorporated 1779**

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

Connecticut Finance, Revenue and Bonding Committee

SB 946, AN ACT CONCERNING REVENUE ITEMS TO IMPLEMENT THE GOVERNOR'S BUDGET

MARCH 9, 2015

Good morning, Chairman Fonfara, Chairman Berger, Senator Frantz and Representative Davis, my name is Donald Stein, and I'm the First Selectman of the Town of Barkhamsted and the Chairman of the Northwest Hills 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, its members, and the other small towns in the State rely heavily on the use of Resident Troopers for the police function in their communities. Additionally, the Town is required by statute to have a Resident Trooper if they wish to employ constables for additional police support. Last year, for the first time, we hired our first constable, who is the School Resource Office for Northwestern Regional High School #7.

Barkhamsted has had a Resident Trooper for close to 26 years. Our troopers have provided a great deal of benefit to the town by quickly solving crimes, heading off potential issues with drug use, juveniles and domestic issues, and by working with the elementary and high school administration on a host of approaches to prevention of problems with the students. The Resident Trooper knows our Town and its residents and is, thus, an extremely valuable resource.

In addition, we are a town like many of the rural towns that have a large geographical area, and not having a Resident Trooper would likely create significant increases in response time to local emergencies. Similarly, if we did not have a Resident Trooper, all coverage in town would be provided by different patrol troopers assigned to the patrol that covers Barkhamsted, and there would likely be less continuity during criminal investigations or no support of non-criminal disputes.

The proposed increase in cost to the towns from 70% to 100% is in reality a 50% increase in annual cost, and in the case of Barkhamsted, will impact our budget by over \$61,000. Based on today's figures, the cost to Barkhamsted of the Resident Trooper would increase from \$126,222 today to a new cost of \$187,720 next year, including the projected 3% increase in pay and benefits. This increase of \$61,498 represents a 3% increase in our General Government

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

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budget. The total cost of the program would then be 1.6% of the total town budget, which will certainly stimulate opposition from those residents who already question the need for a Trooper. As you can imagine, the debate at the town budget meetings will be quite lively, and if the Resident Trooper were to be eliminated by the Town Meeting vote, we would also lose our ability to continue to hire the School Resource Officer.

I very much appreciate Governor Malloy's efforts to keep towns whole in this extremely difficult budget year, and his proposed State budget recognizes that town budgets are already stretched thin. However, this proposed increase will force many towns to give up this very important function, or in towns that employ multiple Troopers, they are likely to reduce their headcount. Both of these approaches will return 100% of these troopers' costs back to the State, which is likely to negate the projected savings from increased Town cost share.

The bottom line is that requiring small towns to pick up 100% of the cost of the Resident Trooper program will undermine public safety in our smaller communities, and if the Towns are able to retain their Resident Trooper, it will force a substantial increase in property taxes. In my opinion, this represents a lose-lose situation.

Thank you for your consideration.