

**Town of Barkhamsted  
Incorporated 1779**

**Testimony**

**Don Stein**

**First Selectman, Barkhamsted**

**Before the Planning & Development Committee**

**Finance Committee of the General Assembly**

**February 13, 2015**

I am writing in **support of the intent of SB-188** to provide towns with meaningful mandate relief. Our taxpayers are increasingly frustrated by increases in their property taxes, particularly when those increases are the result of unfunded government mandates over which we have little control. Thank you for raising SB-188 which includes the following important mandate relief measures:

**Exempting Municipalities from the 1.75% Premium Tax** - Like other communities, Barkhamsted is faced with escalating insurance costs which are becoming increasingly difficult to fund within current revenues. By eliminating the 1.75% premium tax, SB-188 will help reduce municipal costs. Unlike larger towns and cities, we cannot self-insure to avoid payment of the premium tax. Moreover, allowing the state to tax municipalities in this capacity undermines the integrity of the state/local partnership which is critical to good governance. We appreciate the efforts of this committee to provide some relief to small towns struggling to keep pace with increasing health insurance costs.

**Legal Notices Mandate** - Municipal websites are the most appropriate, accessible place to provide the public with information on various legal notices. SB-188 will also save towns money because it costs thousands of dollars per year to publish legal notices in the newspapers. Increasingly, taxpayers go to their municipal websites to find up-to-date information on issues affecting towns, including legal notices. Allowing towns to post full legal notices on their websites and limit publication in the newspapers to a summary of the notices will help control local costs.

**Property Storage Mandate** – Eliminating the property storage mandate makes sense since the town is not a party to the legal process involving eviction and should not bear costs associated with the eviction. Storing the property of evicted tenants imposes some costs on towns, including storage costs and administrative costs. The legislature recognized that it was unfair to require towns to bear the cost of transporting the property from the premises. It should take the next step and leave the town out of the process altogether, as is the cast in the vast majority of states.

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**Probate Costs** – Certainly, responsibility for funding the operating costs for the probate courts should not be borne by municipalities. These costs are increasing every year and must be controlled.

In addition to the provisions in SB-188, I urge you to address one of the most costly mandates, the prevailing wage law, which imposes huge cost burdens on small towns. These costs have been documented time and time again and yet no relief has been provided.

The prevailing wage rates have not been adjusted since 1991 and are therefore woefully out of line with increases in construction costs. A \$400,000 building project, which would now be subject to prevailing wage laws, is a relatively small project. Unfortunately, because of the prevailing wage law, we wind up using out-of-town and many times, out-of-state contractors, for construction jobs that should go to local residents or companies. Clearly, the additional wage costs also make it difficult to fund necessary repairs and improvements to municipal offices, schools and other buildings.

Twenty-four years is a long time to ignore the need to adjust the prevailing wage laws. Projects in Barkhamsted such as renovating the town highway garage and replacing salt storage sheds ended up costing hundreds of thousands of dollars more than it should, imposing cost burdens on our taxpayers.

Raising the prevailing wage thresholds is long overdue.

Given the considerable strain on our local budgets, we must take steps to alleviate unfunded mandates that drive up taxpayer costs. SB-188 would be a significant step in that direction.