CONNECTICUT CONFERENCE OF MUNICIPALITIES
THE VOICE OF LOCAL GOVERNMENT
CCM 2015 Testimony
900 CHAPEL STREET, 9th FLOOR, NEW HAVEN, CT 06510-2807 PHONE (203) 498-3000 FAX (203) 562-6314
Your source for local government management information www.ccm-ct.org

PUBLIC SAFETY & SECURITY COMMITTEE

February 5, 2015

Good Morning,

My name is Michael Criss, First Selectman for the Town of Harwinton.

I am testifying on behalf of the Connecticut Conference of Municipalities (CCM), Connecticut's statewide association of towns and cities representing 96% of Connecticut's population. We appreciate the opportunity to testify on bills of interest to all towns and cities, in particular:

SB 261 – An Act Concerning the Overtime Costs of Resident State Trooper Officers

HB 5106 – An Act Concerning the Cost of Resident State Trooper Officers

CCM and the Town of Harwinton *support* both SB 261 and HB 5106 as they would address inconsistencies in current billing guidelines and procedures to ensure municipalities that utilize Resident State Troopers can appropriately budget and utilize its services.

SB 261 would reduce the amount that towns pay for the portion of fringe benefits directly associated with Resident State Trooper overtime costs from 100% to 30%.

The Town of Harwinton is served by two Resident State Troopers who provide valuable law enforcement services for the community. This program is one of the primary examples of how collaboration and service sharing can be beneficial to the State and municipalities. Without this program the State would be responsible for providing law enforcement services at their full cost albeit from resources available at the Troop or the Community would be required to start their own department at a cost which would exceed available resources. However, the continually increasing cost of the program is becoming a significant financial burden on our local budget and taxpayers. Specifically, the fringe benefit rate for the Resident State Trooper program continues to increase at an unsustainable rate.

In the past five years, the fringe benefit rate has increased at an unmanageable rate. In FY13, the fringe benefit rate was increased to 83.8% percent -- and now for FY15, the fringe benefit is over 90%. A substantial portion of the increase in fringe benefits is associated with the State charging the Town for the large unfunded liability of the State Troopers Pension Plan. Towns should not be responsible for subsidizing the State's failure over time to properly fund their pension liability. Fringe benefit costs which will shortly exceed salary costs are unsustainable.

In addition, on an annual basis local CEOs are not informed of actual rate increases until after July 1st of each year or beyond, almost five months after towns and cities adopted their operating budgets. Each town is required to enter into a two year contract with the State Police for this service except that the contract is silent on cost other than that the towns are responsible to pay promptly what is billed. We have been told on more than one occasion that actual costs cannot be determined until the end of a fiscal year, however there should be a way for the State to make a professional estimate of expenses based on actuarial assumptions similar to what we are required to do with our insurance and pension liabilities and then true up the following year if assumptions are under estimated.

HB 5106 would reimburse towns for the costs incurred when the Resident State Trooper is called to provide services outside of the town or on state highways. Often, a Resident State Trooper is called out of town, thereby replacing law enforcement service in the town under those troopers in the barracks. When this occurs, there is often little to no notification to local officials when the Trooper leaves the town. We understand the need for law enforcement to respond to other events, however the town should not be responsible for those costs. Allowing a town to be reimbursed, or receive a credit for the time spent outside of the town will be another mechanism to curb the growing costs of the Resident State Trooper Program.

These proposals would provide towns that participate in the Resident State Trooper program the ability to better budget for these services and provide some assurance that costs will be sustainable into the future. For each of the some 60 towns statewide involved with this program to have to explore other options for police services is not good statewide public policy.

CCM and the Town of Harwinton urge the Committee and General Assembly to ***favorably report*** **both *SB 261* HB 5106** -- and to amend SB 261 to allow that the fringe benefit rate for Resident State Trooper *regular time* also be capped at 70%.

Thank you.

★★★★

If you have any questions, please contact Michael Criss, First Selectman Town of Harwinton (860-485-9051; mcriss@harwinton.us or Mike Muszynski, Senior Legislative Associate of CCM at mmuszynski@ccm-ct.org or (203) 500-7556.