



CCM 2015 Testimony

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PUBLIC SAFETY & SECURITY COMMITTEE

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The Connecticut Conference of Municipalities (CCM) is Connecticut's statewide association of towns and cities and the voice of local government - your partners in governing Connecticut. Our members represent over 95% of Connecticut's population. We appreciate the opportunity to testify on bills of interest to towns and cities.

HB 6970 "An Act Concerning Emergency Service Personnel"

This bill would mandate the consolidation of *municipal* public safety answering points into *regional* or *multitown* public safety answering points (PSAPs). CCM appreciates the intent of this bill – **as regionalization occurs on a daily basis among many facets of local government and should be encouraged** – however, we have concerns regarding the approach HB 6970 would have, as it would be the proverbial stick looming over already strained local budgets.

While the bill does offer some financial incentives to help with consolidation through the regional performance incentive program (RPIP), it is only for a portion of operating costs associated with transitioning to a regional or multi-town PSAP. RPIP funding is frequently been sought after as a source to fill gaps in the state aid. As a result, funding for the program is stretched thin as it provides vital funding resources to the Councils of Government, and other programs such as the Nutmeg Network. While well intentioned, the funding available through HB 6970 to assist in consolidation could jeopardize the progress of equally important local-regional programs.

Funding is not the only obstacle to ensure proper consideration of PSAPs. There are a number of factors such as union contracts, collective bargaining, facility operations and management that need to be discussed and agreed to by all municipalities. Without these issues being unified, effective implementation will not occur.

Public safety officials rely on a certain degree of flexibility to (a) ensure the safety of their own communities, and (b) address the unique demands and concerns of their citizens. Therefore, local officials should continue to be afforded the discretion to determine which PSAPs work best for their communities – either operated locally or regionally – as they already do now. HB 6970 would hamper local authority to determine how public safety services are delivered by, among other things, recommending that sanctions be imposed on hometowns that do not comply with certain mandated thresholds.

This bill will effect approximately 143 municipalities that have a population less than 40,000. In order for municipalities to implement the proposal properly, each would need to collaborate with an unknown number of other municipalities in order to reach the arbitrarily population threshold of 40,000. Forced regionalism does not breed success. Municipalities should be awarded for efforts to consolidate their PSAPs, but should not be threatened with punishments for failure to do so.

The newly revived M.O.R.E. Commission intends to examine the issue PSAP consolidation. CCM recommends allowing the Commission to examine the concerns that often prevent consolidation from occurring, and based on that information, develop meaningful recommendations or incentives to help lay a path for successful consolidation to occur.

Make no mistake – local officials strive for more efficient means to operate local governments however, they equally require the option to determine how best to manage those communities – i.e. their public safety calls.

CCM urges the Committee to **hold** on **HB 6970**.



If you have any questions, please contact Mike Muszynski, Senior Legislative Associate of CCM at mmuszynski@ccm-ct.org or (203) 500-7556.