



Testimony
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SB-946, AN ACT IMPLEMENTING THE REVENUE ITEMS IN THE GOVERNOR'S BUDGET

The Connecticut Council of Small Towns (COST), which represents 115 towns throughout Connecticut, appreciates the opportunity to comment in ***opposition*** to provisions in **SB-946** which: 1) Shift more of the costs of the Resident State Trooper program onto towns and their property taxpayers; 2) Sweep revenues from the Community Investment Account, which funds farmland preservation, open space, historic preservation and affordable housing programs; and 3) increase the solid waste tax.

RESIDENT STATE TROOPER PROGRAM (Section 26)

SB-946 requires towns to pick up 100% of the costs associated with the Revenue State Trooper program which will undermine public safety in smaller communities throughout the state without saving the state a fraction of the \$4.6 million estimated in the Governor's budget.

Although we appreciate Governor Malloy's efforts to keep towns whole in what is an extremely difficult budget year, cuts to the Resident State Trooper program will have a disproportionate impact on small towns. For example, the following towns would face reductions in funding:

- Tolland - \$270,000
- Mansfield - \$500,000
- Barkhamsted - \$55,000
- Washington - \$53,226
- East Granby - \$99,000
- Lebanon - \$39,856
- Sherman - \$50,000

For more than 60 years, the Resident State Trooper program has been a strong state-local partnership, critical to protecting public safety in 56 small towns throughout Connecticut. In 2011, the amount towns are required to reimburse the state for overtime costs, including fringe benefits, increased from 70% to 100%. The fringe benefit rate, which includes costs associated with pensions, vehicles and equipment, has gone through the roof, from 56% in 2011 to more than 92% for this fiscal year.



Despite these additional costs, the Resident State Trooper program is a win-win for the state and small towns. Resident State Troopers assigned to small towns are routinely dispatched away from their towns to respond to state police matters outside of their community. One town estimates that this accounts for 50% of the Resident State Trooper's time, yet the town picks up 70% of the costs of that trooper plus fringe benefit rates and 100% of any overtime and fringe benefit costs.

Moreover, requiring towns to absorb 100% of the costs of the program may actually *increase* state costs because towns may abandon their Resident State Trooper programs. If a town does not have a police force or resident state trooper, it relies on the state barracks to respond to public safety concerns. The salaries and benefits of the troopers in the barracks are funded entirely by the state. And, there will be fewer troopers subsidized by towns to respond to state police matters. This calls into question whether the state will realize much in the way of savings by shifting more of the costs of the program onto towns.

COST is also concerned that the proposal to increase municipal costs associated with the program has left towns scrambling to figure out what to do as they deliberate their local budgets. Some towns are considering cutting back on troopers as well as constables or are exploring options to share troopers with other towns. Others may consider forming regional police stations. State lawmakers need to make sure that there aren't any barriers to these approaches and that towns have sufficient time to fully explore or budget for these options.

The Resident State Trooper program is a successful example of a program that allows towns to achieve efficiencies in delivering critical services through a partnership with the state. It is unfortunate that SB-946 will undermine this program at a time when state lawmakers are encouraging communities to pursue regional approaches to deliver services.

COST urges you to eliminate Section 26 of the bill and preserve the existing 70% cost share to maintain the viability of the Resident State Trooper program.

COMMUNITY INVESTMENT ACCOUNT (Section 29)

COST opposes efforts to sweep revenues from the Community Investment Account, which is funded by land recording fees collected by municipalities. This program has been a successful mechanism for preserving farmland and open space, supporting historic preservation and encouraging affordable housing programs.

Recognizing the value of these programs to our residents and future generations, municipalities supported the use of municipal fees to support funding for these



programs, despite concerns that towns spend an inordinate amount of time and resources in collecting fees that are diverted for state purposes. Sweeping these funds violates the trust that we placed in the legislature at that time that these fees would be dedicated to protecting farmland, open space and watershed lands, historic preservation and affordable housing.

COST urges lawmakers to refrain from sweeping funds from the Community Investment Account which will eliminate what has proven to be a powerful tool in supporting programs that will benefit Connecticut for years to come.

SOLID WASTE TAX (Section 25)

SB-946 also includes provisions increasing the solid waste tax from \$1.50/msw ton to \$2.50/msw ton and extending the tax to include all solid waste landfilled or shipped out of state. This will increase municipal costs associated with efforts to meet state goals regarding solid waste disposal.

COST is an advocacy organization committed to giving small towns a strong voice in the legislative process. Its members are Connecticut towns with populations of less than 30,000. COST champions the major policy needs and concerns of Connecticut's suburban and rural towns.