



**Testimony
Betsy Gara, Executive Director
Connecticut Council of Small Towns
Before the
Labor & Public Employees Committee
January 29, 2015**

RE: SUPPORT – HB-5070 AN ACT CONCERNING TIMETABLES FOR MUNICIPAL BINDING ARBITRATION.

The Connecticut Council of Small Towns (COST) *strongly supports* HB-5070, which would require all municipal employers and municipal employee organizations engaged in mandatory binding arbitration to complete negotiations within one year from the date that binding arbitration was imposed by the state.

Establishing strict deadlines under the Municipal Employees Relations Act (MERA) by eliminating the option to modify, defer, or waive negotiation deadlines would assist towns in managing municipal budgets. Recognizing this, the Teachers Negotiation Act was modified to reflect strict deadlines.

In order to develop a sound, realistic budget, collective bargaining agreements for municipal employees need to be finalized in a timely manner. Otherwise, a town's proposed budget is forced to rely on assumptions rather than actual costs. Relying on assumptions regarding municipal employee costs can leave town budgets with gaping holes, forcing them to make cuts to other critical services.

As a result, the legislature's Program Review and Investigations Committee report on binding arbitration recommended that MERA be amended to require both parties in an expired collective bargaining agreement to file the mandatory timetable for arbitration outlined in Connecticut General Statute 7-473(c). It based this recommendation on a review of contracts that were extended beyond their expiration date. In 1980, 80% of the contracts were extended beyond their expiration date, and that figure rose to 87% in the years 2002 to 2005.

Unfortunately, given the other issues on the table, extensions to the deadlines are routinely requested and granted, in some cases for years. This results in a situation where back pay must also be paid, further throwing town budgets, which have already been approved, out of whack.

We therefore urge passage of this common sense proposal to address these concerns. *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.*

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