



**Testimony**  
**Betsy Gara, Executive Director**  
**Connecticut Council of Small Towns**  
**Before the Labor & Public Employees Committee**  
**February 17, 2015**

**The Connecticut Council of Small Towns (COST) *opposes* Proposed Bill HB-5871, AN ACT CONCERNING WORKERS' COMPENSATION COVERAGE AND EMERGENCY SERVICES PERSONNEL.**

Although COST members have a tremendous respect for our firefighters, police officers and other emergency services personnel, this bill places an unsustainable financial burden on towns and their taxpayers.

Under the bill, emergency services personnel would receive special workers' compensation benefits on top of already reasonable workers' compensation benefits. As a proposed bill, the language is not fully drafted so it is difficult to determine the specific impact. However, similar proposals in previous years would have allowed individuals to collect such benefits without demonstrating a causal connection between the illness and the job. Towns would then bear the burden of proving that the illnesses are not, in fact, job-related.

This rebuttable presumption ignores long-standing public policy that requires demonstration of a causal connection between the job and the particular incident triggering the injury or illness – a fundamental tenet of our workers' compensation system. Unfortunately, with these types of illnesses, including certain types of cancers, heart and hypertension and infectious and contagious diseases, it is difficult, if not impossible, to prove that the illness is or isn't job related. It is my understanding that these diseases occur in the general population at the same rate as emergency services personnel.

In assessing the fiscal impact of similar measures in previous years, the Office of Fiscal Analysis (OFA) has indicated that the cost of this mandate on towns and cities could be significant. Given the difficult budgetary pressures facing Connecticut's municipalities, we are very concerned about any proposal that will increase costs on municipalities. For small towns, state aid to municipalities has been largely flat funded for many years. However, costs for providing critical services, including education, public health and safety, have increased dramatically.

Although towns are working hard to control local costs, declining revenues and increased costs associated with providing services is taking its toll. Expanding workers' compensation benefits at this time will further strain local budgets and put more pressure on towns to increase property taxes or make cuts in programs or personnel.

Therefore, COST urges you to oppose HB-5871.

*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.*