Testimony Submitted By Suzanne Bates, Policy Director for the Yankee Institute for Public Policy to the Planning and Developing Committee on HB 6851.

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The Yankee Institute for Public Policy is a Connecticut think tank that develops and advances policy solutions to promote a smart, limited government; fairness for taxpayers; and an open road to opportunity for all the people of our state.

I am here to testify in opposition to HB 6851. This bill would create the Connecticut Transit Corridor Development Authority, a statewide, quasi-public, economic development authority with the power to condemn private property, to borrow money, and to assert control over local governments.

The creation of this authority represents a major new economic development initiative by the state government, and yet the executive branch – which has proposed this bill – has explained almost nothing about its intentions for the Authority. The state already has the ability to borrow and spend money on economic development through other state and quasi-public agencies. Why do we need another agency?

This bill gives the Authority the power to condemn property within a half-mile of any transit stop in unnamed "development districts." It gives the power to condemn property within these districts to an appointed board of directors. This is a significant power to place in the hands of an unelected board, who would not be directly responsible to the voting public.

Connecticut is already infamous for a failed "economic development" initiative that led to taking the homes of innocent citizens, all for nothing. If you pass this legislation we could see history repeating itself.

Lawmakers from the executive and legislative branches of government would appoint the members of the board of directors. Local lawmakers would have no control over who sits on the board. In fact, the legislation specifies that when a project is planned in a city or town, local lawmakers would only have an "ad-hoc" role on the board, with no voting rights.

The bill as written directs local lawmakers that they "shall cooperate" with the authority in carrying out its mission. This represents a significant takeover of local control by an unelected board of directors. The state should not be putting this kind of power in the hands of a quasi-public agency, which has little direct responsibility to the people of Connecticut.

The bill says that this authority is meant to "stimulate economic development." I would point out that Connecticut has many fine banking and other financial institutions whose business it is to invest in economic development in Connecticut. The state has already inserted itself into the marketplace through several existing quasi-public agencies. We urge this committee to reject the creation of an additional quasi-public agency that would compete with private enterprise.