



**Barbara Henry
First Selectman
Town of Roxbury
Planning & Development Committee
February 13, 2015**

Good morning Sen. Osten, Rep. Miller and members of the Committee. I urge your support of **Proposed SB-188**, which provides towns with essential mandate relief.

Given the considerable budget challenges facing the state, Connecticut must act now to relieve some of the burden on our small towns and cities. Towns need to have the tools to control local costs. Unfortunately, efforts to control municipal costs are often frustrated by state mandates that make it nearly impossible to reduce budgets or negotiate savings in health care, pension and wage costs. To help our cities and towns meet the difficult challenges of today's economy, meaningful mandate relief must be part of the conversation to ease the burden our small towns face everyday.

Online Publication of Municipal Public Notice

Online publication of legal notices would allow towns such as Roxbury to save much needed funds by posting legal notices on municipal websites. The cost of publishing legal notices in the newspapers has increased significantly. Moreover, many newspapers serving small towns and cities are no longer in business, forcing towns to publish notices in the more expensive metropolitan newspapers. Increasingly, taxpayers go to their municipal websites to find up-to-date information on issues affecting towns, including legal notices. Allowing towns to post legal notices on their websites along with a brief summary in local newspapers provides the community with greater access to important information. This is a common sense measure that will make it easier for people to keep track of legal notices which can be easily missed in the newspaper.

Probate Court Operating Costs

Probate courts were intended to be a self-supporting system. Most recently, the court's operating expenses have far exceeded the fees generated by the court, requiring towns to pick up the excess costs. I urge you to enact legislation that works to ensure that state probate fees are used to completely fund probate operating costs.

Municipal Health Insurance Premiums Tax Elimination

As one of the biggest cost drivers in municipal budgets, municipal health insurance premiums have been a key contributor to increased property taxes in local communities such as mine. The insurance premium tax, a 1.75% tax on fully insured municipal premiums, is estimated to cost Connecticut's towns and cities an estimated \$11 million per year. This is particularly



burdensome because most small towns are not positioned to self-insure and avoid the tax and other health insurance mandates. The elimination of this tax will lessen the burden on cash-strapped municipal budgets.

Possessions of Evicted Tenants

Under current law, towns are required to pay for the storage of a landlord's evicted tenants' possessions. It also requires the town to inventory the items and maintain records. As both storage and administrative costs add up, towns are faced with yet another unnecessary burden placed on already challenged municipal budgets. Relief from this requirement will help to ease that burden.

Additional Mandate Relief Considerations

In addition to the mandate relief issues noted above, I urge you to take a serious look at how mandates are currently imposed on towns and cities across the state. Failure to provide municipalities with meaningful mandate relief and continuing to impose new unfunded mandates on towns will force increases in property taxes and/or cuts to local services and programs. By requiring any unfunded mandate to be adopted by a 2/3 majority of the General Assembly it will help to ensure that the fiscal impact of legislation is carefully considered. I also ask that you consider relief from the following additional mandates:

1. Increase the Prevailing Wage Threshold on municipal public works projects to \$1 million for new construction and \$400,000 for renovations;
2. Give towns more flexibility under the Minimum Budget Requirement to reduce education budgets to reflect cost-efficiencies;
3. Adjust existing binding arbitration laws to reduce burdens on municipalities; and
4. Provide financial assistance to towns to implement the Uniform Chart of Accounts (UCOA) and allow towns to opt out if costs are burdensome and unnecessary.