State of Connecticut
SENATE
SENATOR DANTÉ BARTOLOMEO
Thirteenth District

Testimony in Support of Senate Bill 799
Planning and Development Committee Public Hearing
February 13, 2015

Senator Osten, Representative Miller, members of the Planning and Development Committee:

Thank you for granting a public hearing for Proposed Senate Bill 799, An Act Concerning the South Fire District of Middletown, and for the opportunity to testify here today.

This bill addresses legitimate concerns of the Commissioners, Chief, firefighters and residents of Middletown's South Fire District regarding their current responsibility, both financial and otherwise, for a variety of campuses that are the property of the State of Connecticut.

Prior to 2011, the Connecticut Valley Hospital (CVH), the Albert J. Solnit Psychiatric Center's South Campus (Solnit South), the Connecticut Juvenile Training Center (CJTS), and the Whiting Forensic Institute were primarily served by the CVH Fire Department. Although often dispatched to emergency calls, South Fire District was a secondary responder in those days.

Then, in 2011, the State of Connecticut reorganized and consolidated facilities, which resulted in the closure of the CVH Fire Department.

During a recent conversation with the Office of Policy and Management (OPM) and the Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services (DMHAS), it was recalled that upon closure of the CVH Fire Department, the State had expected to renovate the on-campus equipment storage building that CVH had used as a "firehouse" and allow South Fire District to utilize it as a satellite location. However, at this point in time, no one has been able to determine why the property has not yet been improved and why no other accommodation has been provided to compensate South Fire District—financially or otherwise—for taking over the role of primary service provider.

When considering the extra responsibility placed upon South Fire District, it is important to note that these campuses contain almost 90 buildings with various usages, including psychiatric and medical care centers, a community college, juvenile detention and a maximum security care

facility, and buildings for storage and vehicle repair. Also contained on the grounds of CVH are a number of abandoned structures in extremely poor condition that, should they catch fire, present their own unique safety concerns for first responders.

It is also important to understand that Middletown has three distinct fire departments, each of which is their own tax district. A review of current call statistics, which we will be happy to provide to the Committee, reveals that the aforementioned State campuses comprise 22 percent of South Fire's call volume. Understandably, the residents of the South Fire District feel that their local taxes are disproportionately "funding" services performed for the benefit of the State.

Along with my colleagues in the Middletown Legislative Delegation—Senator Doyle, Representative Lesser, and Representative Serra—I have been working with the Office of Policy and Management since last spring in an effort to relieve the financial burden placed upon our constituents. While the State may have saved money with the closure of CVH Fire Department, it did so by shifting the responsibility and the bill to South Fire District.

The Undersecretary of OPM has been very attentive and understanding of our plight, but unfortunately we have not determined an acceptable solution to the problem. We did explore the idea of a bond allocation, but have found no acceptable accommodation allowable under our state policies.

Left with no other recourse, we have submitted Senate Bill 799 asking that a service contract be entered into by the State of Connecticut that would allow South Fire District to be reasonably and fairly compensated for service calls on State property.

I urge the Committee to vote favorably on this legislation, and I thank you for your time and consideration of this matter.