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Court of Common Council



CITY OF HARTFORD
550 MAIN STREET
HARTFORD, CONNECTICUT 06103

OFFICE OF COUNCILMAN LARRY DEUTSCH
CHAIR, COMMITTEE ON HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES

Members of the Finance, Revenue, and Bonding Committee:

I am Dr. Larry Deutsch, member of Hartford City Council, third term, and Working Families Party.

As you see, many citizens are here to testify today in opposition to SB 464, An Act Establishing the Hartford Financial Sustainability Commission. You'll also see that there are SEVERAL other members of our City Council who are against this proposal, with additional members in both parties critical of some provisions. I'll not repeat their testimony.

We all – citizens in and beyond Hartford, we on our City Council, you as Assembly members – recognize there are difficult budget issues throughout cities in Connecticut and other states. Municipal financing is in crisis from where we sit in Hartford, Connecticut, to Flint and Detroit, Michigan, to Stockton and Bell, California.

In these and many cases, "shared sacrifice" has been shallow, state tax collection from individuals and corporations able to pay has been avoided, and fair distribution to urban areas – largely minority – has been cut.

Each state and district has traditions and laws regarding development of local budgets and fair representation for contracting and labor relations, and then for maintenance of basic services to residents.

Today it's so crowded because this proposal, SB 464, appears to violate several well-established procedures for checks-and-balances, especially collective bargaining and rules for neutral, fact-based arbitration when necessary. Much power would be given to a small Commission rather than democratically-elected City Council and established rules for labor negotiations in the public and private sectors.

We hope for agreement that the process and results of negotiated agreements must be fair, just, and justified. Taxes must be fairly and progressively received in proportion to ability to pay, and services delivered in proportion to need and society's interest.

Specifically in this Bill, there are several aspects that we remain convinced contradict these principles already written in tradition and in state and city law. You'll note that designated membership is not sufficiently and democratically representative of the City: its labor and businesses; its political parties; and its balance between legislative (City Council) and executive (Mayor) branches.

Some details and facts have been well-presented by the Minority Leader and other Council members. There are solutions other than a special Commission to avoid fair and respectful negotiation, or bankruptcy and receivership. The city Administration is only now beginning with transparency to engage in honest, real negotiation, and fair collective bargaining.

We count on you today at this Committee session, and later this evening on other members at a City Council meeting, to carefully read the details and reject this proposed SB 464.