

20 March 2016

Re: SB- 464 - *An Act Establishing The Hartford Financial Sustainability Commission.*

I would like to express my support for this bill as a necessary element in addressing the critical financial situation faced by the City of Hartford. I fully understand that very difficult choices must be made. Many of the difficult decisions, however, will be viewed as the city renegeing on past promises, particularly with respect to labor agreements. I do recognize that these past agreements were irresponsible and simply not financially feasible, but government can function only if civil society has full faith and trust in government actions. Therefore, my primary concern with the act is the section 3(b) exemption from the provisions of chapter 54 of the general statutes. The act leaves the extent of transparency and public engagement solely to the discretion of the appointed commissioners. If the public views the commission as a group of 'insiders' imposing their priorities on the city, I fear for the future of Hartford. The community must be engaged in the work of the commission to develop the broad consensus that will be needed to successfully implement the necessary difficult decisions. I would prefer to see some specific requirements incorporated into the act to ensure that Hartford residents have transparent and timely access to key information in order to effectively participate.

Specifically, section 4 (a) (1) specifies that if the council does not act on or before its next regularly scheduled meeting, recommended modification to the annual budget will become effective. Does this mean if the commission makes a recommendation on the Friday before the next regularly scheduled Monday meeting, the council has only the weekend to respond? I would prefer to see specific requirements for public notice of the recommendations with some minimum time for council review guaranteed. I believe it is critically important to provide ample opportunity for Hartford residents to engage in this process as a necessary requisite for sustainable support for the financial sustainability commission.

Similarly, section (5) (a) specifies the city shall annually submit a financial plan to the commission, commencing with the financial plan for the first full fiscal year succeeding the establishment of the commission. Assuming the act passes this session, ending May 4, the commission could be established before the next fiscal year commencing July 1, 2016. Does this provision mean the city could be required to immediately submit an annual plan? I would like to see some specified minimum time for the city to respond and provisions for public access to relevant information to comment on the annual plan. The structural changes required for the city to succeed can only be achieved with an informed and engaged public that is viewed as a partner in this effort.

Finally, two comments, which may be outside the scope of this act.

1.) Section (4) (8) empowers the commission to recommend to the city measures to improve the efficiency and productivity of the city's operations and management. I would urge partnerships with local corporations, such as United Technologies, which have deep experience with the discipline of lean transformations that could greatly benefit the city in reducing operating expenses and improving service delivery. There is also a wealth of talent within the greater Hartford region that I am confident would be willing to volunteer to help in such process improvement initiatives.

2.) I was surprised to see no reference to the imbalance between residential and commercial property tax assessments. As a Hartford homeowner, I understand and accept the need for additional revenue and feel that the balance could be shifted to help ease the burden on small businesses without overly burdening homeowners.

Thank you for your consideration.

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