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OPPOSITION for SB 464, An Act Establishing the
Hartford Financial Sustainability Commission

To: Members of Finance, Revenue, and Bonding Commission

Good morning Senators and Representatives. Thank you for your service and for taking the time to listen to the concerns of so many of your fellow Connecticut residents in regard to SB 464. My name is John Szewczyk and I am a Sergeant in the Hartford Police Department where I have served for the past 14 years.

Let me begin by stating when I say thank you for your service I truly mean it. Most of you have full-time jobs in addition to serving in our “part-time” legislature, which we all know is most definitely not “part-time”. Your pay is minimal for the amount of hours you put in, both during session and in months when you are not in session. In addition, maybe the most overlooked issue is that many of you represent citizens from more than one municipality, each municipality with different, unique issues. In many cases you even represent towns with different forms of local government as well. You are stretched thin providing assistance to your constituents, your mayors and first selectmen, all while attempting to make good public policy and trying to keep the state budget in check.

The city of Hartford is facing a \$9 million dollar shortfall this budget season. Few are denying that. However, that is \$9 million dollars on a budget which last year was \$533,814,785. This amounts to a 1.69% budget shortfall. Even next year’s expected budget shortfall of \$30 million dollars equates to only a 5.62% shortfall.

In addition to working for the City of Hartford for the past 14 years, I have also served as a Selectmen in the Town of Durham since 2007. I would be absolutely ecstatic to have a budget season with only a 1.69% budget shortfall. It is often far worse. I spoke with a few city council members from a neighboring community just last evening. Their sentiments were identical to mine as I would expect to be the sentiment from most of the Mayors, First Selectmen, Council Members, Boards of Selectmen, and Board of Finance Members from the municipalities which all of you represent. Many budget shortfalls often equate to much more than 1.69% and that is where the role of a good elected official comes in.

Elected officials are tasked with making difficult choices. They must weigh spending tax dollars versus higher mil rates. They are elected to do just that. They often are forced to say “no” to spending tax dollars on a worthwhile project in the name of fiscal responsibility, sometimes to the displeasure of constituents. They might shake their heads at the spending policies of a previous administration, but they improve those policies going forward by making better decisions in the future. It doesn’t happen overnight, but a good administration will take a long-term approach to putting their municipality in a better fiscal position than what it was when they started by adjusting timeframes for capital improvement projects, bringing new businesses to town, growing the grand list and eliminating excess government waste. Simply put, they lead.

What an elected official does **not** do is ask for a special state law for their municipality only, just to close a 1.69% shortfall. They don’t decide that contracts won’t be honored, existing arbitration panels won’t be utilized or pension payments won’t be made. They don’t devalue labor, those who have built the city and continue to ensure it runs properly. Instead, they make tough decisions while following the same rules that every other municipality in this state has to play by.

There is one common denominator in each municipality throughout Connecticut, many of which you represent. Each and every town is struggling to balance a budget and provide tax relief to their residents. This is no different than what each of you are doing at the state level with the state budget. If 1.69% is the threshold for requesting a new state law and taking these catastrophic measures, then what type of message are we sending to the elected officials of the other 168 municipalities throughout the State of Connecticut and to the valued labor forces that helps run these cities and towns?

I ask you to reject this proposal and urge Hartford’s elected officials get to work on their budget utilizing the same structure that every other municipality in the state must abide by, no different than what the elected officials in each and every other municipality throughout this state are doing during this budget season.

Thank you for your time.

Respectfully Submitted,

John Szewczyk

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