



Town of Wallingford, Health Department
45 South Main St.
Wallingford CT 06492

Eloise Hazelwood, RS, MPH
Director of Health

Phone: 203-294-2065 Fax: 203-294-2064
Email: health@wallingfordct.gov

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Public Health Committee

Testimony: SB 355-An Act Concerning Local Health Districts and Health Directors

Members of the Public Health Committee: My name is Eloise Hazelwood, and I serve as Health Director for the Town of Wallingford and have served in this capacity since 2001. **I oppose SB 355 for several reasons:** Local Directors of Health are already statutorily required to submit an annual report to CT DPH, the report content is stipulated by CT DPH and affords the Commissioner the opportunity to review or "audit" performance.

The CGS 19a-2a currently states, in-part, the Commission of Public Health shall have authority over Directors of Health and may, for cause, remove such Directors. My point is Local Directors of Health are already subject to oversight. It is imperative that the authority vested in Local Health Directors to protect and enforce Local Public Health not be overshadowed by additional statutory language that is bedded in CT DPH accreditation needs, such as the proposed enabling legislation, which mandates specific time frames of audits. The audits, as proposed, involve review by CT DPH of municipal governmental departments. This authority is overreaching.

The Town of Wallingford total population being under 50,000 residents, disqualifies the Full Time Municipal Health Department from per capita funding. The tax paying residents residing in the Town of Wallingford are therefore not represented in CT public health per capita dollars. **The proposed language further represents an unfunded mandate and a burden to local government.** What are the expectations of local municipalities if the proposed audit determines insufficient public health programming or local health does not have adequate staffing? CT DPH will require additional staffing in order to comply with the proposed language, additional staffing equates to more salary at the state level. Funding to increase public health services should be directed to local health. Local Health provides direct services to our residents and direct enforcement of public health statutes, regulations and ordinances within Connecticut's 169 towns and cities. The proposed language does nothing to increase a Health Directors ability to respond locally. We are already unfunded or underfunded. As with any department, we must prioritize services. SB 355 serves to remove Local Health authorities' ability to prioritize based on the needs of the residents we serve in our own communities. Instead the proposed audit language will have us focus our resources on preparing for audits and checking a box for CT DPH accreditation.

All of Wallingford Public Health programming is funded by local government through the town general fund. This applies to many municipalities with populations under 50,000 and disenfranchises residents based simply on where they choose to live.

Direct public health services are provided through local health departments, **not** the state Department of Public Health. CT DPH is a resource that provides subject matter experts, but the actual implementation of programming and code enforcement rests with the Local Health Authority and is contingent upon the needs of the local communities we serve. Local Health Directors have a direct obligation to the community they serve and to the LOCAL municipal leadership who provide funding for the public health services.

Thank you for your time and consideration in the opposition of SB 355.

