

**Testimony before the Public Safety and Security Committee
March 3, 2016**

I'm Stephanie Summers from Willington.

I am here to speak to you about Raised Bills 234 and 235.

[234: An act concerning the location of a firearms training facility.]

[235: An act concerning the construction of a firearms training facility.]

A resident of the state of Connecticut shouldn't require an Act of the Legislature to be treated fairly. And yet, this is where we stand today regarding a flawed idea to put a state police firing range in the center of our residential town of 6000. I heartily thank the committee for seeing how wrong it is and for proposing these solutions.

I favor Bill 234 for requiring the state to use existing state land for such a project because it would remove both Willington and East Windsor from the table. I also see it as in step with Gov. Malloy's call for the state to embrace a new economic reality – one of balancing need against desire, and wisdom against folly. I hope this bill keeps the options open for the state police to train at underused firing ranges in this small state or nearby. It seems paramount to do so, given our deep fiscal crisis and public safety interest in a speedy solution to training needs.

I also favor the bill's call for a needs and cost study for the facility. Since the beginning of the process in May, the state has not offered any real plans, real costs or real information about its research and timing. My town has been stuck in limbo for 10 months, stalled in a process that should have never been started, had the homework been done up front.

In Bill 235, I urge you to retain the requirement for sound and bullet baffling on any state gun range. We learned Feb. 2 at this committee's hearing with state commissioners that baffling was not even in the state police plans. Talk about baffling. Forgoing such obvious protection to any community is mindboggling.

This proposed complex would include 170-decibel, 50-caliber, armor-piercing military weapons, active shooter training and long-range sniper training for a few. Given the invasive scope of these activities, increasing the state Payment in Lieu of Taxes to a community – especially an unwilling one – is warranted.

I support that Bill 235 limits the range facility to 30 acres and restricts future expansion. It also builds in a way to offer a large amount of open space for town conservation. But I think it needs revisions to make sure there is sufficient buffer to the firing range sound and lead impact on all of its borders, not just the side that abuts 200-plus acres of open land.

Last, I am very troubled that Bill 235, by its 230-acre minimum, removes East Windsor from consideration but leaves Willington still squarely within the crosshairs. I realize the state just announced looking at 3 new sites for this facility, but they are not formally on the table. Willington is. I hope the committee will correct this issue, preferably by supporting legislation to remove both of the unwilling communities from the state Scoping process at once.

Thank you for your attention and efforts on our behalf.

How the State Treats a Small Town

I urge the committee to consider these lessons from the Scoping process – still under way in Willington – that may inform your decisions:

- The state ignored Willington's state-mandated Plan of Conservation and Development that maps the proposed site on Ruby Road as a priority for conservation, one with wetlands, watershed and natural resources.
- The state ignored its own statutes CSA 16a-35 that protect non-Priority Funding Areas against encroaching state development and that support preserving a small town's "village charm." Willington is not in a Priority Funding Area.
- The Environmental Impact Evaluation required under the CEPA process includes an expert ecological review of site activity over four seasons. And yet the state told Willington at its May 2015 public hearing the study would be done by October 2015. Ten months later, it has not yet been started.
- The public hearing and comment period under the state Scoping process is billed as lasting one month. Ours in Willington was one week – May 28 to June 4, 2015.
- At the May 28, 2015, public hearing in Willington, the state presentation included a list of criteria for site selection, e.g. state-owned land, brownfields, abandoned airports, existing gun ranges. Willington qualified for none.
- The state did not have its money lined up. To date, monthly requests to the Bond Commission for \$700,000 for site EIEs have borne no fruit, freezing Willington in a process without a clear end date.
- No project plan on which the 2012 appropriation for the facility was based could be produced on request. OPM said the deadline had passed for keeping the records, despite the project's open status.
- The state did not communicate openly at the outset, nor in the 10 months since then, in response to an outpouring of public objections, questions, FOI requests, legal points, etc.
- The lack of state due diligence on having its plans, cost estimates and money in place before putting a town into a formal Scoping process has cost Willington residents and their town government massive amounts of time, money, effort and peace of mind. Something is very wrong with a process that treats its good citizens and taxpayers in this manner.

Respectfully submitted,

Stephanie Summers
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