

STATE OF CONNECTICUT
HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES



J. BRENDAN SHARKEY
SPEAKER OF THE HOUSE

Good morning Representative Miller, Senator Osten and distinguished members of the Planning and Development Committee. I'm offering testimony today in favor of a series of bills that were developed through the work of the M.O.R.E. Commission this year.

House Bill 5601: An Act Concerning the Connecticut Transportation Institute and a Study of School Transportation Efficiencies

House Bill 5602: An Act Concerning Regionalism,

House Bill 5603: An Act Concerning Regional Technology.

This package of legislation looks at ways that we can offer municipalities more opportunities to save money, which in turn, can result in less of a dependence on property taxes to fund essential services. This package of legislation utilizes the basic principles of regionalism by encouraging collaboration to offer a more efficient and cost effective method of delivering services at a time when all budgets are being tightened.

Educational costs can often account for up to 80% of a municipalities' budget. **HB 5602** will allow our Regional Education Service Centers (RESC's) to apply for RPIP funds. Allowing RESC's to apply for this same fund, that our Councils of Government (COG's) already apply for, will allow for greater savings and foster greater collaboration within municipalities by allowing for more joint shared services.

There should not be any reason why the person who mows the lawn at the high school can't also mow the lawn at the town park. We need to look at how we can reduce duplicative back office functions within a municipality. The first step is by allowing the RESC's to apply for the RPIP funds so that it can be used to make these entities work together for the better of the taxpayer. We are also asking that plans of conservation will now take into account the need to promote regional efficiencies in education and educational opportunities.

Coordination of law enforcement services between municipalities can provide valuable opportunities for cost saving and improved coverage. In considering the regionalization of law enforcement, the Commission on Municipal Opportunities and Regional Efficiencies (MORE) contemplated three models. When municipalities are forced to consider consolidating law enforcement to accommodate fiscal realities, sharing resources in this way can be a viable way to preserve services. Cooperation has the potential to allow the sharing of equipment, greater consistency in coverage due to decreased need to call in outside reinforcements like state police, and opportunities for more training concentrated on fewer personnel with more hours.

A pilot program allowed two Connecticut towns, Roxbury and Bridgewater, to share a Resident Trooper starting in 2014, a joint contract that both towns chose to renew in July of 2015. In municipalities with lower populations, Resident Troopers can serve multiple communities (like Roxbury at 1,704 residents and Bridgewater at 2,322) at similar ratios as they would be serving in larger towns (like Columbia, with one State Trooper and 5,464 residents). Regional Police Departments in Pennsylvania have reported decreased costs, increased coverage and training, and improved community involvement as impacts of regionalization. Law enforcement partnerships in the forms envisioned by the MORE Commission or otherwise can allow municipalities greater coverage and lower costs if such partnerships are both feasible and desired.

One area in particular where regional cooperation is both enhanced and utilized effectively is in the use of technology. The Nutmeg Network continues to allow municipalities to operate more efficiently and improve back office functions. Encouraging greater access to and better utilization of the available technology remains a main focus. **House Bill 5603** seeks to create a statewide technology plan that will weave technology deeper into the function of government and provide municipalities greater opportunities to create technological efficiencies and savings.

HB 5603 looks to take steps to create a statewide technology plan. It will look to identify and convene key stakeholders to provide input to a Statewide Technology Plan that informs the Plan of Conservation and Development at the local, regional and statewide level and include state and local technology linkages. Such plans of conservation and development would now take into consideration the application and use of technology to enhance efficiencies, foster collaboration, increase transparency and access to information and reduce costs.

In an effort to make municipalities more aware of cost saving opportunities **HB 5603** asks that a list of technology contracts that are available from the state. The purpose of this is to make sure that any applicable opportunities are made available to all political sub-divisions so that they can better realize cost savings.

Student transportation budgets are a major cost to municipalities. It is inefficiencies that drive up these costs. We need to change the way we are transporting our students, but we need to do so to come to a solution with solid data and guidelines in place. As we look for ways to lift costs that burden our taxpayers there are certain items that are deemed to be 'low fruit', or sensible options to alleviating municipal costs. School transportation costs are one of those items. **HB 5601** will take the initial steps that will allow us to identify savings for our taxpayers.

HB 5601 calls for a study to be performed by the Connecticut Transportation Institute (CTI), which operates within the School of Engineering at the University of Connecticut. They are a well-respected and long established group who has already partnered with the state on many research endeavors. They will be tasked with identifying best practices to be used to reduce costs and increase efficiencies in student transportation. Afterwards they will report their findings to the Education and Planning and Development committee. Based on what they report, it is envisioned that legislation would be drawn that would permit and encourage school districts to regionalize more of their student transportation.

There should not be a reason why there are six busses, from four different towns, all traveling on the same road to deliver students. This is the true definition of inefficiency. These are the inefficiencies that add up to bloat municipal budgets and raise local property taxes. Savings found in student transportation can go towards actual educational items that will actually benefit our students.