



***PLANNING & DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE***

March 11, 2016

The Connecticut Conference of Municipalities (CCM) is Connecticut’s statewide association of towns and cities and the voice of local government - your partners in governing Connecticut. Our members represent over 96% of Connecticut’s population. We appreciate the opportunity to testify on bills of interest to towns and cities.

My name is John Elsesser, I am the Town Manager of Coventry, and serve as the Second Vice President on the Board of Directors for CCM. I am here to testify on the following bill of concern to towns and cities.

**HB 5601**      **“An Act Concerning the Connecticut Transportation Institute and a Study of School Transportation Efficiencies”**

**HB 5602**      **“An Act Concerning Regionalism”**

**HB 5603**      **“An Act Regional Technology”**

**HB 5604**      **“An Act Concerning Regional Efficiencies”**

Collectively these bills represent the recommendations of the Municipal Opportunities for Regional Efficiencies (MORE) Commission, on whose subcommittees numerous municipal officials serve. The MORE Commission was tasked with identifying efficiencies, opportunities to regionalize services and promoting ways that municipalities can work together to maximize shared services and lower the cost of providing local services. It must be clarified that the municipal members of the MORE sub-committees did not participate in the deliberations that led to the set of proposals before you today.

The recommendations represented by the collective raised bills listed above, while well-intended, raise numerous concerns for towns and cities and fail to identify needed relief from burdensome unfunded mandates.

## **HB 5604: REGIONAL EFFICIENCIES**

CCM has strong concerns with HB 5604, which would require the MORE Commission, in consultation with OPM, municipalities, labor unions and business leaders, to study regionalization best practices and develop a regionalization evaluation tool which would be used to measure and assess the performance of and efficiencies achieved by each municipality and local and regional board of education. Additionally, the bill would require the MORE Commission to submit recommendations for municipal aid funding based on criteria established by the regionalization evaluation tool.

This is problematic to towns and cities. Changing the process by which municipal aid is funded and delivered is a step not to be taken lightly. While numerous municipal CEOs have participated in the MORE subcommittees – only state legislators serve on the actual commission -- the MORE Commission is a body with no statutory authority, no rules by which it approves policy or legislative recommendations, no meaningful oversight and no set process by which the membership is selected. Allowing such a commission to evaluate and possibly determine the distribution of municipal aid based upon an as yet defined evaluation criteria raises too many concerns for towns and cities and cities to support at this time.

Further, the proposal establishes a mechanism and date by which municipal aid will be reformatted before a study has been conducted.

Establishing an Institute of Local Issues at one of the State universities would present a better approach to develop what would likely be a very intricate tool and one that fairly assesses 169 communities.

## **HB 5602: REGIONALISM**

CCM supports section 1 of HB 5602, which would allow any municipality to purchase equipment, supplies, materials or services from a person who has a contract to sell such goods or services to other state governments, political subdivisions of the state, nonprofit organizations or public purchasing consortia available through a regional educational service center or regional council of governments. This is a common sense proposal that would expand the pool from which municipalities can purchase goods and services and may result in lower costs.

CCM has concerns with section 2 which would add Regional Education Service Centers (RESCs) to the existing list of entities that may apply for grants available under the RPIP further diluting this already shallow funding pool. A solution maybe to allow Town applications to specifically work as partners in projects with RESCs.

CCM opposes sections 3, 4 and 5 would impose an unfunded mandate by expanding the scope of issues that must be considered when towns and cities update local Plans of Conservation and Development (POCD) to include recommendations to promote regional efficiencies in educational and educational opportunities. The cost of updating local POCD are substantial and the

requirement to expand that mandate is troubling to towns and cities. These recommendations should provide savings to towns and cities not add additional burdens that must be met by local taxpayers. Planning and Zoning Commissions may not be knowledgeable about the operations or laws of the Town and State.

CCM strongly supports section 6 which would allow any municipality to partner with one or more municipalities to share the services of resident state troopers or other law enforcement personnel.

This is an issue that municipalities statewide have raised, with the increasing costs of providing local law enforcement and to the Resident State Trooper program this section increases the options available to towns and cities when it comes to providing public safety. This is an issue where current law prohibits regionalization and this measure knocks down the barriers and allows municipalities to find the best and most efficient way to provide law enforcement in their community.

CCM opposes Section 7 which would allow for RPIP funds to be used by the State Auditors of Public Accounts to audit private providers of special education services. This is the responsibility of the State and should not be conducted with scarce funds that should be directed to local and regional efficiency projects.

## **HB 5603: REGIONAL TECHNOLOGY**

As previously stated **any expansion of the requirements to be considered when updating local POCDs is a mandate**, and the recommendation of HB 5603 to require any POCD updated after October 2016 to consider the application and use of technology to promote efficiencies and reduce costs is an unfunded mandate. Towns and cities already adhere to a lengthy a prescriptive list of issue that must be considered when updating a POCD, efforts should be made to reduce the time and costs of updating and approving a POCD rather than adding to the burden.

Additionally HB 5603 would establish December 31, 2017 as the deadline for municipalities or COGs to apply for grant funding to implement and operate the “Nutmeg Network”. CCM opposes the proposed deadline for applications as numerous projects remain unfunded and would recommend these grants remain available until the demand for connecting to the Nutmeg Network has been met.

## **HB 5601: STUDY OF SCHOOL TRANSPORTATION EFFICIENCIES**

The bill would authorize the Connecticut Transportation Institute to study methods and practices local school districts may utilize to reduce costs and increase efficiencies in the provision of student transportation. To complete this study, a grant in the amount of \$250,000 from the Regional Performance Incentive Programs (RPIP) may be used. The RPIP grant is intended to

fund municipal applications for regional projects and this additional study would further draw down on these limited funds leaving municipal and regional projects stalled.

CCM and its member towns and cities look forward to working with the Committee, the proponents of these bills and continuing to work with the MORE Commission to identify and remove the barriers to regionalization, provide the opportunities to realize efficiencies in the provision of local services. These proposals while well-intended provide limited means for towns and cities to save money, rather it creates a further dilution of needed RPIP funds and imposes new unfunded mandates.



If you have any questions, please contact Randy Collins, Advocacy Manager of CCM at [rcollins@ccm-ct.org](mailto:rcollins@ccm-ct.org) or (860) 707-6446.