



## **Testimony on House Joint Resolution 1**

Submitted by Suzanne Bates, Policy Director

February 29, 2016

Good morning. My name is Suzanne Bates. I am the policy director for the Yankee Institute for Public Policy, a Connecticut-based free market think tank.

**I am here to explain our reservations regarding House Joint Resolution 1.**

Let's all first agree that it is very important to keep our roads, rail lines, and other transportation needs in good working order.

Residents assume that the taxes they pay on gas, as well as the other fees and taxes dedicated to the special transportation fund, will go to maintain these important state assets. We know that this isn't happening, and we are troubled by this, as I know you are as well.

However, I want to raise concerns that if you pass this resolution, and then voters ratify it, and then lawmakers try to find a way to get around what would then be a constitutional provision, it will further damage respect for our constitution and undermine the public's confidence in the General Assembly's ability to discipline themselves when it comes to spending.

Connecticut is proudly known as the "Constitution State." In 1639, the first constitution in North America was approved here in Connecticut. This is something we should be celebrating. But when we change or amend our constitution in a way that does not feel genuine, it damages that reputation.

We have a constitutional amendment – the spending cap – that has never been fully enacted even though more than 80 percent of this state's residents voted for it 24 years ago. Polling last year showed an overwhelming majority of the state's residents continue to support the cap.

As Connecticut constitutional lawyer Wesley Horton said at a recent public forum: "Every single (legislator) takes an oath to obey the constitution of the state of Connecticut and of

the United States. They obviously aren't paying attention to their constitutional duty when they take their oath of office."

The lockbox is not the spending cap. But, if you are going to pass this joint resolution, I urge you to do so only if you are confident that the General Assembly will adhere to this provision, and thereby set the example for future legislatures. If – as many suspect – you believe lawmakers will try to get around the "lockbox," please leave this out of the state's constitution.

Thank you.