



Testimony of

Lori J. Pelletier, President

Connecticut AFL-CIO

Planning & Development Committee

SB 450 An Act Concerning Municipal Volunteer Services

SB 421 An Act Concerning Multiple Budget Reserves for the Biennium Ending June 30, 2019

March 16, 2018

Good morning Representative Lemar, Senator Cassano, Senator Logan and members of the Planning and Development Committee. I am Lori Pelletier and I am proud to serve as President of the Connecticut AFL-CIO on behalf of over 900 affiliated local unions that represent more than 220,000 working men and women in every city and town of our great state. Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony in opposition to SB 450 An Act Concerning Multiple Volunteer Services and SB 421 An Act Concerning Municipal Budget Reserves for the Biennium Ending June 30, 2019.

Connecticut workers have always been strong advocates for their employers. Though we may have different points of view at the bargaining table, there isn't a worker in this state who doesn't want his or her employer to succeed. That is true in the private and the public sector.

Countless municipal and board of education bargaining units have come to the table over the last few years to aid financially struggling cities and towns. They have given money out of their own paychecks, often compromising their own household budgets and risking their own retirement security, to assist their employers. Workers in the City of Hartford alone have made at least \$25 million in concessions over the last eighteen months.

Yet year after year, instead of partnering with labor representatives to identify duplication, waste, inefficiencies and other savings opportunities, municipal advocates have come to this committee, and others, to shift blame, shirk responsibility and attempt to weaken workers' bargaining rights. Together, municipal elected officials and municipal union leaders could be a dynamic force on behalf of taxpayers, but mayors and first selectman would rather attack workers' rights and demonize public sector workers.

SB 450 An Act Concerning Municipal Volunteer Services

In many municipalities, civic-minded volunteers often help by performing simple tasks, such as shelving books in public libraries and staffing information desks. Organizations representing municipal employers would have this committee believe that allowing volunteers to perform more physically and intellectually demanding work done by municipal employees would yield significant savings. The truth is, a measure like SB 450 opens municipalities up to a whole host of liabilities and would create a new series of financial problems for cities and towns.

Municipal government must fulfill many critical responsibilities and obligations. Taxpayers demand, and the law requires, a level of competence and quality of service that only skilled and experienced professionals can provide. Municipal government is not a training ground or networking opportunity for volunteers interested in gaining new job skills and professional contacts.

Expanding the types of municipal services provided by volunteers raises a number of questions. Will they be using dangerous equipment, driving automobiles, managing cash and other financial instruments, working with confidential data, utilizing computer systems with sensitive information or interacting with populations that demand specific levels of care, attention and compliance with the law, such as students, the elderly, the sick and disabled or developmentally challenged? How will volunteers be vetted and screened for potential risk? How will they be trained? Who is responsible for their negligence or wrongdoing? These questions are not answered in SB 450.

What if a volunteer is injured performing municipal work? They are not eligible to receive workers' compensation to treat their injury. Will volunteers be expected to sign a waiver of medical liability in order to work for free?

Do we really believe that there are a significant number of volunteers willing to devote the time required to deliver uninterrupted municipal services without being compensated? Even if there are legions of volunteers ready to capably serve, payment of monetary compensation is not the sole factor in determining employment status. Just because a volunteer is unpaid does not mean the municipality is not responsible for their actions or inactions.

Cities and towns could also be liable for their behavior towards volunteers. For example, volunteers are not generally protected by federal or state laws prohibiting discrimination and harassment. Those protections are only afforded to employees. A municipality could be sued for a manager's inappropriate behavior toward volunteers.

We urge the committee to reject this bill.

SB 421 An Act Concerning Municipal Budget Reserves for the Biennium Ending June 30, 2019

This bill attempts to expand what was already a significant concession provided to municipal employers in the 2017 bipartisan budget. By expanding the irrebuttable presumption to apply to negotiation in addition to arbitration, municipal employers again are hiding behind their own failed management practices and scapegoating workers for their lack of budget reserves. They would be wise to discontinue this attack on workers and instead engage in meaningful regionalization efforts.

We urge the committee to reject this bill.

The Real Solution: Regionalization

Despite what members of the General Assembly have been led to believe, collective bargaining is not an impediment to regionalization efforts. On the contrary, in many instances, collective bargaining has provided the platform by which successful regionalization plans have been implemented. The true impediment to regionalization is home rule. It is a fragmented, decentralized system fraught with political patronage and other disincentives to modernize and economize. No one can legitimately suggest that moving municipal government and service delivery can be accomplished while preserving home rule.

For too long, taxpayers have subsidized the inefficiencies of home rule. It's time for municipal governments to provide the same level of cooperation, coordination and shared functions that other

states provide at a far more affordable price. There are a few things that can be done immediately that would begin the long overdue process of achieving regional efficiencies:

1. Require municipalities who receive state municipal aid dollars to enter into the state healthcare partnership plan

The size of the state employee healthcare plan allows the state to leverage good benefits for an affordable price with minimal or nonexistent annual increases. Statute allows municipalities to participate and the Comptroller's Office has already worked with several to save money while improving worker benefits. But most municipalities have failed to even explore this option. Instead, many offer multiple, varying plan designs to different bargaining units. They utilize expensive insurance brokers to aid them in this process. Brokers, and their fees, could be eliminated entirely by participating in the partnership plan. But so might CCM's Connecticut Interlocal Risk Management Agency's (CIRMA) business, and we fear that is the greatest obstacle to full utilization of the state healthcare partnership plan and the realization of savings it can provide.

2. Establish a statewide municipal coalition bargaining agent in statute

A Municipal Employees' Bargaining Agent Coalition (MEBAC) should be created to negotiate common mandatory subjects of bargaining on a statewide level, such as pensions and healthcare. This could be based on the state's SEBAC model and would save dozens of municipalities weeks, if not months, at the bargaining table and would potentially significantly reduce arbitration costs. A MEBAC could also use economies of scale to achieve savings in a number of areas. For example, CCM and COST have advocated for many years to change the employer contribution rate in Municipal Employee Retirement System (MERS). Labor representatives have repeatedly suggested the establishment of a MEBAC so that employer and employee rates could potentially be revisited over time via collective bargaining. CCM and COST have consistently opposed those efforts.

3. Commission a cost-benefit analysis to determine what the state could save by implementing meaningful county government.

County governments were legislatively abolished in 1959 primarily because they were never updated after being established in 1785, even though labor, transportation and communications advances, among others, were significant. Because the state and local governments had historically wielded substantial authority within Connecticut, county governments never achieved the authority needed to gain a stronghold as a viable source of government. Instead of taking a historical view of how colonial settlers established government for a 17th Century way of live, it's time we look to see how we can restructure our government to maximize our scarce resources in the 21st Century.

The Connecticut AFL-CIO strongly urges the committee to carefully scrutinize misleading or false information that has been provided and allow it to instead be guided by the facts. We urge rejection of SB 450 and SB 421. Thank you.