

Chairman and members of the Transportation Committee, I thank you for the opportunity to speak to you this afternoon. I stand before you to voice my objection to the new language proposed in Sec. 5 Section 13b-80 of bill 5314.

My name is Thomas Snow and I am representing Collins Bus Service, a business started in 1912 by my Great-Great Grandfather. We are a family run small business that has made great investments to this state's public transportation system since 1958. We have always been committed to altering our services to meet the state's needs all the while doing so at the lowest cost possible to the tax payers. From humble beginnings providing public transportation to farmers working in tobacco fields, through expansions moving factory workers to Pratt & Whitney during wartimes, to today bringing workers and students from suburban towns into the city of Hartford. We have always met the public transportation demands of the state of Connecticut and will continue to do so with your support.

I proudly stand before you representing the 5th generation of my family to work for Collins Bus Service. The language in this bill threatens the growth and prosperity of many small family-run businesses in the state of Connecticut. It would allow the DOT to revoke the certificates that these businesses have purchased and invested countless hours and sums of money into over the decades.

As you may be aware the Governor has made transit a large part of his platform, expanding bus service whether funding has been approved or not. The commissioner of the Department of Transportation recently attempted to strip these certificates away from companies like ours via eminent domain. That case made its way to the Connecticut Supreme Court in December of 2016 with the court recognizing the validity and value of the certificates for our companies. The proposed changes to the statute are nothing more than the DOT's next attempt at revoking these certificates.

Within the last year, through a questionable bidding process that resulted in only one company bidding for the operating rights, the DOT added routes which overlap pre-existing ones. Rather than expand the already established routes, the DOT's choice resulted in buses from multiple companies running on top of one another, increasing costs for taxpayers.

There is already wording in the existing law to allow for the revocation of the certificates for sufficient cause. Broadening the scope of what it means to have sufficient cause in this manner will have dire consequences for small businesses including ours. You will see businesses close. You will see drivers, mechanics, cleaners and administrative employees laid off.

I believe the certificates currently in place have enough value to make changes unwarranted. As a private operator our expenses are considerably lower than that of HNS Management, the current contractor operating CT-Transit. The unions representing the CT Transit employees have a stronghold on the state's bus transit system. Their wages are well above what the private sector market has set. CT Transit employees are given a fully funded pension, something the private sector is not able to offer. All of this comes at a substantial cost to taxpayers.

In conclusion, I believe the proposed changes in bill 5314 will negatively impact the state and raise costs, not lower them. The changes would result in small family owned business laying off employees and in some cases shutting their doors. We ask that you fully consider the effect of this legislations intention. My family's business helped pave the way for public transportation in this state. We are proud to serve the state on Connecticut and plan to do so for years to come. Again, Thank you for your time this afternoon.