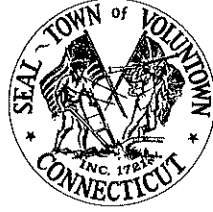


OFFICE OF THE SELECTMEN



115 Main Street
P.O. Box 96
Voluntown, CT 06384
Telephone: 860 376-5880
Fax: 860 376 - 3295

March 23, 2018

Worthy Chairpersons, and Members of the Appropriations Committee, Commerce Committee, Finance Committee, Revenue & Bonding Committee, and Planning and Development Committee,

For the record, my name is Tracey Hanson and I am the First Selectman of the Town of Voluntown. I am sending in this testimony in full support of the *State Commission on Fiscal Stability and Economic Growth's* recommendation that the State pay a higher PILOT payment to municipalities. I would also like to remind all of the committee that rural towns, like Voluntown, can contain a lot of state owned property and not just cities.

The State of Connecticut is a major stakeholder in the Town of Voluntown, as it owns about 68% of our land through the DEEP. According to the 2017 State Owned Real Property for the Town of Voluntown list, the State of Connecticut owns a total of 16,354.41 acres of Voluntown. Also, according to this list, the assessed value of this land and the buildings on it, combined, is \$16,786, 880. Most importantly, it must be noted, that this net assessment total is based on a PA 490 assessment. Most, if not all, of this state owned land is assessed as PA 490 for forestry. This adds double the tax burden on Voluntown residents! Do you know how much the Town of Voluntown received in PILOT funding for FY18, and is estimated to receive for FY19? Just \$98,340. If the town received the full PILOT amount, based on our current 29.45 mill rate, and with the PA 490 net assessment, we would receive about \$494,373 in PILOT funding. Imagine how much that fully funded PILOT would be if the land was NOT assessed as PA 490!!

This current PILOT fund arrangement with the state is felt by all of our local taxpayers. We have been seeing the PILOT funding decline every fiscal year, while the State of Connecticut is actually purchasing MORE of our land. With these cuts (and cuts in other state revenue grants), the town has been struggling to meet and provide basic services that all other town's take for granted. The consequences of the state not paying it's share has resulted in our mill rate increasing, even when our town budget has actually GONE DOWN. For FY18 we cut our budget by \$39,000, and we still had a 1.38 mill rate increase. It is important to note that one mill in Voluntown is equal to only about \$199,000. Also, please note, we have no recreation center, no senior center, no high school, and no resident trooper. We have no road foreman and only 2 Public Works employees. We are running out of places in our budget to cut!

With the amount of land that the State of Connecticut owns in Voluntown, and the money that we lose if that land was assessed as residential or business, the local taxpayers are covering for more than their fair share of road and bridge repair, as well as for public safety. Our population nearly doubles in the summer with people that come here to enjoy the outdoor recreation provided on state owned land. The town of Voluntown has 29 miles of town owned road. The State of Connecticut owned property has road frontage on most of these roads. We have a bridge on Forge Hill Rd that is on our list for repair. This is the bridge used by vehicles towing boats to the state owned Beach Pond boat launch. Our volunteer fire and tax payer supported EMS public safety officials respond to emergencies on the state land and water. The state even cleared a Life Star landing spot in the Green Fall area of the state forest because of the number of life threatening emergencies that happen there.

For over 20 years First Selectmen in Voluntown have been fighting for an increase in PILOT funding to offset the the tax burden on our residents and property owners. I have quickly come to realize at the start of my term as First Selectman, that an increase will more than likely never happen. This fight has turned into stopping cuts to our PILOT funding and into keeping the PILOT funding in place until an alternate solution is found. We need to finally solve this "issue" of the State of Connecticut covering it's fair share as a landowner in Voluntown.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,



Tracey Hanson
First Selectman
Town of Voluntown