March 15, 2019

PLANNING AND DEVELOPMENT 12:00 p.m.
COMMITTEE PUBLIC HEARING

CHAIRPERSON:  Representative Cristin McCarthy Vahey, Senator Steve Cassano

SENATORS:  Bradley, Cohen, Champagne, Somers

REPRESENTATIVES:  Baker, Rojas, Conley, Stafstrom, Arnone, Gucker, Michel, Zawistowski, Dubitsky, Carney, Haines, Delnicki

REP. MCCARTHY VAHEY (133RD):  And we are going to recess until approximately 12:30 actually, just to give enough time for folks to be able to get back in. So, with that, we'll recess.

RECESS

SENATOR CASSANO (4TH):  Good afternoon, Ladies and Gentlemen. We're going to convene the public hearing for the Planning and Development Committee. I'd like to make one announcement in the interest of safety. I would ask you to note the location of and the access to this room. The doors on the back side here, you're familiar with, with the emergency exits. In the event of an emergency, walk quickly to the nearest exit, and we also have no exits up front here. So, you can only have one choice, left or right, going out. After exiting the room, go to your right to exit the building, which is out this way. Please quickly exit the building and follow any instructions from Capitol Police. Do not delay and do not return unless you're advised to do so.
In the event of a lockdown, which we've had before in this building, please remain in the hearing room. Stay away from exit doors, and seek concealment behind desks and chairs until an all clear announcement. Thank you and welcome.

This is a public hearing of the committee. We have a traditional -- we have a traditional process, where elected agencies and officials of the state government will speak first, followed by the public, and so I'd ask my -- my Chairman, extinguished -- [laughing] distinguished Chairman McCarthy Vahey to make a few comments.

REP. MCCARTHY VAHEY (133RD): Thank you so much, Mr. Chair. I just would like to welcome everyone here today, and in the spirit of hearing and listening, we really look forward to hearing the conversation today. I'll point out that on today's agenda, we have two bills that are exactly the opposite of one another, and it's in that spirit that we welcome your comments and your input into this democratic process. Thank you for being here with us.

SENATOR CASSANO (4TH): Thank you, Madam Chair. Just one point I would ask, and I try to urge people not to read your testimony. We've had your testimony in many cases since yesterday. We do read it. It's important to us to see it and to read it, but you speaking of what you're feeling as opposed to what you're reading makes a big, big difference. And I would ask you to think about that. It's much easier to make a point. In your own ways, you can refer to the testimony and so on. Please don't just sit there and read it because we already have it.
So, I'd rather hear it from you and not from what you wrote. Thank you. And, to begin the process, the Honorable Brendan Sharkey. Welcome.

BRENDAN SHARKEY: Thank you, Senator. Before I begin, I just feel it's -- it is important for us to just recognize the passing of one of our dear colleagues that we just found out about this morning. So, I'm a -- it's with a heavy heart that, our brother, a good friend of all of us in this chamber and in the General Assembly generally, will be very missed, and he was a terrific guy.

So, with that, thank you this morning for having me and allowing me to speak on HB 7318, AN ACT CONCERNING REVISIONS TO THE UNIFORM RELOCATION ASSISTANCE ACT. I'm here today, Madam Chairs and Madam Ranking Member, and members of the committee, to testify on this bill, and I thank you for raising it as an issue because my capacity in dealing with this is not in my role as a former Speaker, or representing a particular outside group, but rather the town of Hamden for whom I have served for several years as an assistant town attorney.

One of my jobs as an assistant town attorney in Hamden is to manage the Uniform Relocation Assistance Act, which I dare say maybe most people at this -- in this hearing today have never heard of. But it is an act that was created in the early 70s originally as a program to ensure that tenants who are displaced as a result of eminent domain proceedings, urban renewal projects, transportation projects, tenants who are displaced as a result of the state taking over properties are adequately provided for in terms of alternative housing. And,
about ten years later, in the early 80s, the statute was expanded a bit to include local code enforcement activities, and it was really meant in the context of a city or a town undertaking a citywide code enforcement effort on housing codes and building codes with the understanding that if that code enforcement results in someone having to be moved out of their home, the town is gonna be responsible for relocating that tenant with the opportunity to get reimbursed from the landlord, who committed the code violation, so that the town and taxpayers of the town are kept whole. The problem with the statute is that it's very poorly written. I don't think anyone would argue that it's not, frankly. I know you'll have folks from the housing community who will speak later on today, who I've been talking to for some time now, about how we can fix this problem.

But the statute is incredibly ambiguous, and my written testimony goes into some examples of how ambiguous it is. There's no requirement, for example, for towns in the case of temporary dislocations. There's no heat. There's a code violation. The Health Department comes in, declares it uninhabitable because the furnace is broken. Now, this is a temporary problem that can be fixed. In Hamden's case, we put that tenant up in a hotel, and then we bill the landlord for those costs, but there's nothing in the statute that says we have to do that. And the landlords could, and have oftentimes, come back to us and said why did you give these benefits away, and why are you charging us now because the statute doesn't require you to do that.
So, this level of ambiguity, I think, that has lasted for years, has not only led to disparities in our interpretations, our being the towns' interpretations and housing advocates' interpretations of what is required and what isn't, but it has also left tenants in a very difficult situation because the application of the URAA, it differs from town to town. Some towns take the -- don't even know, as I think may be the case for those, again, in this committee -- may not even know that this statute exists. And so, therefore, the towns don't even follow or make an attempt to follow the URAA. What I'm asking for in this committee -- from this committee, is the opportunity to have the advocates and the municipalities and, frankly, the landlords to sit down and talk about how we can clarify this statute, establish the rules that every town can abide by and understand, so that everyone is protected, not only the tenants, the landlords, but also the taxpayers, who are the frontline of this statute and have to front the costs for relocations that occur under the act, but may or may not be eligible or able to get those taxpayer dollars reimbursed from the landlord.

So, that summarizes my testimony. I also just wanna say that I -- briefly -- that I'm also in support -- I don't have testimony on this -- but I'm in support of House Bill 7319, WHICH IS THE ACT CONCERNING FISCAL INDEPENDENCE OF SCHOOL DISTRICTS. This recommendation is one of the key recommendations that came out of Governor Lamont's Shared Services Committee in the -- in the transition, a committee which I co-chaired with Rick Porth from the United Way of Connecticut. This was a consensus position that the notion of being able to allow for separate
taxing authority for boards of education not only increases transparency for how education dollars are spent at the local level, but it also, I think, can lead to a lot of other efficiencies that can occur within the education sector, and you have speakers who will be coming after me to testify on that as well. So, with that, I would be happy to answer any questions that you may have.


REP. DUBITSKY (47TH): Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Thank you for coming in. You're familiar with the crumbling foundation situation up in northern Connecticut, right?

BRENDAN SHARKEY: Yes.

REP. DUBITSKY (47TH): I'm wondering how that would play with this new amendment if -- just walk me through it -- if a building inspector came and said, you know, looked at an apartment house and said, okay, this place is about to cave in. All -- you know, the town would pay for temporary relocation of the tenants. It may not necessarily be so temporary 'cause, you know, fixing a foundation may not be a quick and easy thing. How would this bill affect that situation?

BRENDAN SHARKEY: Representative, it's a great question, and frankly I had not applied that situation to the act, but it certainly would apply. The act actually contemplates permanent relocation, situations where a house or a unit of housing is
declared uninhabitable, and it's clear that it's not just a temporary scenario that's gonna get fixed like the ones I described in my verbal testimony earlier. But, situations where a unit of housing is completely uninhabitable, and it doesn't look like it's gonna get fixed anytime soon, maybe a fire, maybe catastrophic damage from a flood, or a crumbling foundation that is not gonna get fixed anytime soon, under that scenario under the URAA, towns -- if a resident is -- it's not just tenants, it can also be homeowners as well under the act -- if they are dislocated as a result of a code enforcement activity carried out by the local code enforcement official, the town must supply relocation assistance in the form of either emergency housing, while they're also providing assistance in locating permanent replacement housing, along with benefits that in 1971 dollars was about $4000 dollars for tenants and more for homeowners who are displaced.

REP. DUBITSKY (47TH):  Is that per month?

BRENDAN SHARKEY: Total -- not to exceed -- but again, that was in 1971 dollars. So, that's actually relatively cheap now. But the town would then have to front all those expenses for those individuals who are dislocated as a result of a code enforcement activity, and then go to the landlord or the property to lien the property for reimbursement of those costs, which may or may not ever be collected. So, it's a great point, and it is something that you should be aware of because it could -- the URAA could be invoked by property owners and/or tenants who are falling victim of the crumbling foundation scenario.
REP. DUBITSKY (47TH): And how would the proposed amendment affect that?

BRENDAN SHARKEY: Well, we are asking for clarity and a differentiation that would establish what does a town need to provide in a temporary dislocation situation as opposed to a permanent. And just -- all we're wanting to do is just clarify what the rules are. We don't wanna deprive tenants or owners of benefits that they -- we can all agree, they would be entitled to under the URRAA, but we also don't know when and where those interpretations of the statute would apply depending upon the circumstances. So, what we would really ask for is a -- an effort -- for the advocates, for municipalities to get together and come up with clear language for the statute that would really clarify who's responsible for what.

REP. DUBITSKY (47TH): Thank you. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

SENATOR CASSANO (4TH): Other questions?
Representative Arnone.

REP. ARNONE (58TH): Yeah, thank you very much. So, on clarifying these, I think that's a reluctance of municipalities to use this right now because of it being so fuzzy. So, when we have most of these disasters or problems that take so long to get assistance because we end up going through a Social Services route, and it could take days and weeks, and to have an emergency system in place for towns I think it'd be much, much easier for them to, you know, to move through the system, and that's, I
think, a reason why they look at this and they're unsure of it.

BRENDAN SHARKEY: Yes, and I think there's merit to the original intent of the statute, which really was affecting state agencies and only state agencies, and then we expanded to cover municipalities later on. I do think it's important that towns -- this is an unfunded mandate, except to the extent that funds can be reimbursed by the landlord -- but it is important, I think, for towns to be the frontline in these scenarios to make sure that tenants and others who are displaced as a result of the code enforcement activity are not just put out on the street. And if the landlord does not step up and do what is required of landlords under these circumstances, which really should be the first line of defense, but if the landlord will not step up and provide alternative housing, towns should be the frontline to offer the backup support for that tenant to be relocated appropriately and then be reimbursed by the landlord. So, I don't think there's any question, and I don't think there's any sense from towns that I've talked to that they don't -- those who even know that the statute exists but also understand what its intent is, I don't think anybody resists the notion that the towns should be in that role. The problem is that we don't know what the rules are.

REP. ARNONE (58TH): Right. Agreed. And that's -- I think the big problem is we wanna step up, most municipalities, and I know my town has all the time stepped up, but again, there's no -- it's very hard to navigate through the bureaucracy to get the need immediately.
BRENDAN SHARKEY: Yes.

REP. ARNONE (58TH): So, and again, it's important to sell it out too. I'll make sure I go home and make sure my council knows that this exists.

BRENDAN SHARKEY: Right. Exactly.

REP. ARNONE (58TH): So, thank you.

BRENDAN SHARKEY: Thank you.

REP. MCCARTHY VAHEY (133RD): Thank you, Mr. Chair, and it's great to see you here, Mr. Speaker.

BRENDAN SHARKEY: It's great to be back with the Planning and Development Committee, naturally.

REP. MCCARTHY VAHEY (133RD): Yes, your roots. [Laughing] Just a question for you. You mentioned that you're really looking for specificity, and that you have been having conversations with some of the advocates. So, is it my understanding that you're interested in continuing that conversation and maybe further refining the language in this bill, so that it can be something that's workable from both sides?

BRENDAN SHARKEY: Yes, in fact, I actually supplied with my testimony some additional revisions to the language that the committee might wanna consider as a JFS that would perhaps establish a basis for that conversation to be had. This is also the kind of thing that, I hate to say it -- fortunately, Representative Belsito is not in the room -- but this might be the kind of thing that would lend
itself to a study group, an effort, a task force, something like that, assuming we -- I think we could actually reach a conclusion among all the interested parties before the end of the session, but if we have a vehicle out of this committee that will enable that conversation to go forward, I think that will be very helpful.

REP. MCCARTHY VAHEY (133RD): And I wanna thank you for that effort and willingness, and I certainly as a the Co-Chair am willing to help those conversations continue to see if we can come to some resolution that works, whether it is this session and a bill that we're able to pass or, yes, sometimes those studies and task forces are very important to the process, so. Thank you. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

BRENDAN SHARKEY: Thank you, Madam Chair.

SENATOR CASSANO (4TH): Thank you, Madam Chair. One quick question as well, Mr. Speaker. Some people look at the bill as a disincentive for the municipalities to move 'cause they're afraid of what the end results might be. That's one of the questions that has come before us. Particularly with the changeover, if we look across the state, in elections and so on at a local level, there's a major changeover every two to four to six years, whatever it might be. So, grasping something like this is really difficult for a new mayor or first selectman and so on. So, how do we really keep it in place with that kind of changeover and the fear that if I do this I'm gettin' into a can of worms that --?
BRENDAN SHARKEY: Well, the problem is the existing statute is the can of worms, frankly. It is -- it is very -- in the many attorneys, housing advocates, tenants that I've dealt with, as an assistant town attorney myself, I have gotten different interpretations from different advocates depending upon the circumstances of the statute. And I think the ambiguity of the statute is what creates the worry. I think most of the housing folks that I've spoken to are frustrated. It is true they're nervous about the idea of changes, but they're equally, if not more, frustrated by the fact that most towns don't even abide by the act as it stands now. And, as I said earlier, the reason towns don't abide by it is either they (a) don't know it exists or (b) because the language is so confusing they don't know how to actually apply the statutes, or which portions of the statutes to apply to which circumstances.

I've offered some suggestions in my testimony, but I think clarity will help everyone. I think it'll help towns, and I think it'll help tenants going forward. The current situation of the ambiguity that's out there is not helping anyone frankly, and I think we -- we can all be better off if we have a much clearer statute.

SENATOR CASSANO (4TH): Thank you much. Appreciate it.

BRENDAN SHARKEY: Thank you.

SENATOR CASSANO (4TH): Town Manager, Matt Galligan, from South Windsor. I allowed the Speaker a couple of extra minutes as point of privilege for the
Speaker. [Laughing] Town managers get two minutes. [Laughing] If I start to go like this, that clock says your three minutes is up, and in fairness to everyone let's try and keep it the same. Thank you.

MATT GALLIGAN: [Laughing] We go back a long way, so I take that wholeheartedly. You've been a great asset and great mentor too, so. I wanna thank the P and D Committee for lettin' me speak today. The testimony is here. I'll try and do it without it.

I'm here for Bill HB 7319, AN ACT CONCERNING FISCAL INDEPENDENCE FOR SCHOOL Districts, which is looking to allow school districts to be able to be a taxing authority. I think I can say very favorably, I have a lot of experience in this coming from the state of New York. I was first an auditor for the State Comptroller's Office under Levitt and Ed Regan, and we used to audit cities, villages, school districts, special districts, and special requests from the Governor on special investigations, and that was my job to go across the entire state. I was also the City Manager in the city of Newburgh, New York, and Village Manager in the village of Mamaroneck, New York.

The reason why I'm in support of this bill is because of transparency. The one thing that this does and when we were putting budgets together in New York it's transparent. You wouldn't mix the local government with the budget, and it stopped a lot of the nonsense. I was very concerned when I first came to Connecticut that the superintendent comes in with an 18 percent increase, the board puts it to 12, it's gonna be the end of the earth, the council fights for days and days. It's goes to
three, gives 'em four, and we're back in business, and then next year it starts all over again. And I think it's a waste of time and energy to be doin' that.

There are also things in the town side of the budget that you don't see. The debt service is there. Right now I have a Capital -- we have a joint Capital Projects Committee. There's over $1.2 million dollars of Capital projects that are going to the board of ed, and it's in the town's side of the budget. And the one thing that's happening, even after 23 years of bein' in South Windsor, people still think that I produce the board of ed budget. The press says, "Town Manager recommends $120 million dollar budget," but my budget's only maybe 32 percent of that. But I take the heat for raising the taxes, doin' all these crazy numbers and stuff, and people still don't understand what the process is, all right.

In the -- in the state of New York, the budgets were done -- how it happened was in the city, we would actually send the tax bills out. There's no -- there's no added cost, there's nothin'. We sent out the tax bills for 'em. We collected their taxes for 'em. We remitted. Nothin' really changes. The relationship between the local governments, between the board of ed and the town, was much stronger because nobody was competing for the same dollars. People were -- people actually didn't have to compete about priorities, didn't have to fight with the council, didn't have to fight with people, and in the state of New York, 680 school districts are all voted by the public. And in the last -- if you look under the State Education Department the last
time, last year, 98.6 percent of this was -- was voted on and approved by the residents. The town -- the state also has what they call a constitutional tax limit, and that's -- that's for every board and commission and everything.

So, I would say that it's doable. You're gonna get a lot of arguments that it's gonna change. I know it's a major change, but it allows the board of ed to do what they do best when it comes to educating children and not having to come to the town council side and have that fight. And I think the public will be more involved in their board of ed budget by going to those meetings rather than just coming to the town council meeting and arguing about what you're gonna collect and what you're gonna cut out of the board budget. I think there'd be more meaningful discussions at the board level by having this type of system versus what is now in the state of Connecticut. And I do have testimony here, so I'll leave that for you to review.

REP. DELNICKI (14TH): For the record, I was on the committee that hired Matt Galligan as Town Manager back in -- I think it was 1995 --

MATT GALLIGAN: So, he's to blame. [Laughing]

REP. DELNICKI (14TH): -- maybe '96, in that timeframe, and I've worked with him for a number of years, and I have a feeling we may have a different view of this entire issue here --

MATT GALLIGAN: We probably do.
REP. DELNICKI (14TH): -- that we have here before us. For the record, I was Mayor of the town of South Windsor, participated in those so-called budget deliberations that we had. And, quite frankly, I've gotta ask you a question pertaining to transparency 'cause you mentioned that this act would promote transparency. In the town's budget book, now I can't attest to what other towns do, but in the town of South Windsor's budget book, was there always a clear delineation of exactly how many dollars went to the school board budget and how many dollars went to the town budget? And I believe we even broke out what the cost was of school referendum bonding projects separately versus town also. Is that a fair statement?

MATT GALLIGAN: Well, yeah. It's a fair statement, but there's only one line item on the budget. It says $75 million dollars, that's it. I took the initiative of breaking out the debt and the others to try and get information out to the public that we are looking to bond a project. Here is the school debt -- that's in my budget -- and my budget is much, much more detailed out showing where all these numbers are. I would say that most people, if you look at the board of ed's budget, they're not that detailed. Everything seems to be in category and totals, where my budget, you'll see that it's laid out to -- to the absolute detail. But somebody would have to be astute enough to go in and understand and grab that information.

REP. DELNICKI (14TH): But it was clearly stated in the budget that you would submit to the town council what those numbers were, and it was just a matter -- and unlike our state budget, it was fairly simple
with different budget categories and tabs that took you to exactly what the bonding was, exactly what the board's budget was and expenditures --

MATT GALLIGAN: That was in my budget, yes.

REP. DELNICKI (14TH): -- and exactly what the town's expenditures were.
MATT GALLIGAN: That's exactly what was in my budget, but more detailed, yes.

REP. DELNICKI (14TH): The next question revolves around the concept of autonomy of the board of education if they were given full rights and authority to have their own taxing district. Typically, cities and towns have a process whereby the board submits a budget as you described and then the budget is discussed between say a finance board ["Um-hm, right" in background] that holds the purse strings or a town council that would basically also hold the purse strings when it comes to setting mill rate for the town.

So, if this was done, would the board of education, in theory, have the ability to basically decide exactly what their budget is going to be -- and yes, they would have a public hearing so the people of the town would have an opportunity to speak on it -- but could they set a budget based on what they felt versus based on what discussions between the citizens and the council and the board of finance felt was appropriate?

MATT GALLIGAN: Well, yeah, they could set their budget, but town councils can do that to. We have public hearing all the time, and the council doesn't
always follow the public hearing or the public when it comes to doing certain things. I would say at this point, it's very confusing because right now you have a two-and-a-half percent cap in the state of Connecticut, which I apply on my budget. And when it comes to the board coming in and they say we're gonna raise the budget by $4 million, that cap hurts me because I may be under the cap originally in my budget, but now I'm over the cap totally. So, by separating 'em out, you're gonna know exactly who's within the cap and who's not within the cap. And I would say what you may wanna consider -- I know probably most boards of ed and superintendents would kill me right now -- but you have to have some sort of -- what they call it in New York is constitutional tax limit. The limit is two percent, and what they do is they figure out what your average assessments are, increases over a five-year period. There's calculations. You can take out debt, you can take out pensions and stuff, and then you come down to a number that says of that two percent, this is the amount of money you're gonna raise next year for the budget.

Now, if you need to go over the two percent, you can do that, but you have to have a referendum, and 60 percent of the voters have to vote in favor of it. So, you do need to have some backstops. I don't see the backstops in the legislation right now, but I think it does work as far as not changing anything between what we do in government and what the board does. People will say here, well who owns the buildings? Well, the public owns the buildings. I mean, and even in New York, I mean, we used the school buildings for our recreation programs and all that. I mean, none of that has changed, but I think
it gives it much more clarity that here's where you're spending your money.

REP. DELNICKI (14TH): But, getting back to the original question, and the original question focused around setting a mill rate for a separate tax bill, the board of education would then have autonomy on setting a mill rate without having a finance board weigh in, without having the town council weigh in, without having a town manager weigh in -- that tend to be a little tighter when it comes to fiscal issues. Is that a fair statement?

MATT GALLIGAN: That's a fair statement, yeah. That would happen -- unless you put in those safeguards that I've talked about.

REP. DELNICKI (14TH): So then, if we were to do this, you would say that we should have a constitutional cap and a referendum?

MATT GALLIGAN: Yeah, I would tell you that in most of the states that I'm aware of that have this type of system, most of the boards -- school boards are adopted by a vote of -- a referendum vote. And you have that in Connecticut. You have certain towns that have town meetings. You have certain towns that have a vote on it by referendum. All the municipalities, like town government, village government, and city government, they don't have a referendum 'cause they're really a small portion of that, so -- of the entire tax burden, so to speak. The other thing that you have to be aware of too is that, if you do this, town -- boards of education cannot foreclose on property. So, there has to be a backstop here. So, in the state of New York, what
happens is the -- the towns and the cities, whatever they didn't collect at year end, we would make 'em hole. So, therefore, that money, the board would be holed on the budget, and then we would then be able to put a lien on that -- on that property. Under state statute, you couldn't let taxes go more than three years on a property, so you would have what's called an in-rem proceeding. So, most of the time, the cities and the towns and villages would wind up getting that money plus whatever interest, like you have here.

REP. DELNICKI (14TH): So, looking at Connecticut Association of Boards of Education testimony that was submitted, they made a statement in there pertaining to the fact that cities and towns presently do a great job with tax collection. Why in the world would they wanna be a part of tax collection when cities and towns are doing it?

MATT GALLIGAN: They don't have to because in the city of Newburgh we collected all the taxes, we sent out the bills, we made the bills based upon their budget. And the village of Mamaroneck, town of Mamaroneck, all the communities in the state of New York all send out the bills and still collect the taxes.

REP. DELNICKI (14TH): Well, we're not talking New York here, we're talking Connecticut.

MATT GALLIGAN: Well, it would still be the same thing here. I mean, there'd be no reason for the South Windsor Tax Collector -- we could still collect the bills. I mean, the bills would maybe go out differently, like one may go out in September,
one may go out in January, but that collection process still goes into the same bank accounts and they'd be able pay their bills.

REP. DELNICKI (14TH): I'm not entirely sure that that's correct, and I'm just taking a look at lines 94 to 98, and just for the purpose of clarity, I'd like to read them, "except that any municipality served by a local school district described in subsection (a) of section 1 of this act, or any municipality comprising a regional school district described in said subsection, shall have no power to assess, levy, and collect taxes for the purpose of provided educational services."

MATT GALLIGAN: It doesn't have to be. That assessment of property can still be done by the assessor's office. You're puttin' maybe another layer in there. That layer was not in New York. We did -- we had an assessor. The assessment was basically for both the -- for all properties in which the school board used that assessment. We collected taxes all the same. For some reason, I don't think really in my mind, if you're gonna do it, you need them to be taking on that burden when it's already being done.

REP. DELNICKI (14TH): But you still would be in favor of the school board setting a mill rate for their portion of the budget?

MATT GALLIGAN: Yeah, I don't have a problem with that because what happens is is that we sit there for hours, where town council people -- and you've sat there with me -- will argue about well why do you have this Italian program and Spanish program
and this program and that program. We argue for hours, and yet the charter says you're only allowed to cut the bottom line. So, when did we all become experts as to how education and how things should be treated? We hire a superintendent. We hire business people to make those decisions, to follow state statute, and make sure that our kids are bein' educated the way they should be. I'm not -- I'm not familiar with that. I can build buildings. I can do police. I can do other things, but I think that responsibility, when it solely rests with them, you're gonna find they get smarter. They're gonna get more fiscally responsible. And I think when the public really comes to them and the public really understands that it's them that creates those dollars and stuff, you're gonna find a different way of doing business.

REP. DELNICKI (14TH): My concern still lies in the fact that your board of finance, your town council is a check and balance on the entire system. Typically, the town manager looks at what the town can afford ["Um-hm" in background] and makes an educated decision based on that -- based on what the impact is going to be on the business community, on the average person, the entire town. We would be eliminating that if we were to do this. Is that a correct statement?

MATT GALLIGAN: Well, it's a correct statement, but there's been many times that, you know, that local governments because people like education better on a town council -- how many times did the town council cut my budget to make up for the differences on the education side in which my capital count went from $3 million dollars down to $100,000. I mean,
those are the risks that you take that we're fightin' with now, where right now, bein' separated, we can continue to do our business, and they can continue to do theirs, and it's up to the people on the board of ed, as it is the town council, to be the stewardship of that money and have a fiduciary responsibility to take all that into consideration and that they're adults and they should be able to do that. And, if not, you un-elect 'em or you don't vote for that budget.

REP. DELNICKI (14TH): And it's interesting you make that comment because typically on a board of education, ten people run, nine people get in.

MATT GALLIGAN: Um-hm.

SENATOR CASSANO (4TH): Mr. Delnicki --

REP. DELNICKI (14TH): It's almost a fait accompli, is that fair?

SENATOR CASSANO (4TH): One more question. We're -- if we go on at this rate, we'll see Saturday. So -- [Laughing]

REP. DELNICKI (14TH): I was hoping to vet all the questions on it. Needless to say, I have significant concerns over the proposal. I think it actually short circuits oversight, and Matt, I love ya dearly, but this is one that I don't think that we see eye-to-eye on.

MATT GALLIGAN: Ah, we've disagreed before, so it's okay. [Laughing] I can handle it.
REP. DELNICKI (14TH): Thank you, Mr. Chair.
["Thank you very much" in background]

SENATOR CASSANO (4TH): Representative Zawistowski, followed by Representative McCarthy Vahey and then Representative Arnone.

REP. ZAWISTOWSKI (61ST): Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Thank you for coming in today. Just by -- by disclosure, I come from a board of finance background, and I found your example somewhat interesting. We're talking about -- and we've all seen this -- where the superintendent recommends, I think you said 18 percent, and the board of ed brings it down to 17 percent, and the town council brings it down to four.

Like Representative Delnicki, I am very concerned about the local checks and balances on something like this, especially if you start getting into -- into regional school districts. I really think that it's important for it to be some local voice, some voice of moderation. I'm more concerned about -- about a budget coming in at 17 percent and then and having that brought to the voters.

You had mentioned also a constitutional tax limit -- in New York, I think you said -- you said two percent.

MATT GALLIGAN: Two percent.

REP. ZAWISTOWSKI (61ST): Doesn't that kind of make a de facto two percent increase every year because people know that's the backstop.
MATT GALLIGAN: Well, no, because what happens is, if you do the calculation, there are times that you -- let's say you put a $3 million dollar increase in your budget, you do the calculation, and it says you're only allowed to raise $2 million dollars. So, it's -- it's a calculation that takes in a couple of different variables to make sure that -- they call it a two percent tax limit, but sometimes, if you do the calculation, you find out you may be at one percent. And, the only way to go past that, again, is to have a special referendum that people -- 60 percent of people have to vote for.

REP. ZAWISTOWSKI (61ST): Okay, the reason I was thinking that, I know that we do have some towns here that, I think, if you go to referendum, on the third shot, it winds up at a set percentage. And, all of a sudden, like magic, you have -- that's your tax increase every year because you just basically wear the populous down. So, I am concerned about something like that.

And, transparency, I know a lot of times, as I said, coming from a board of finance background, that with a board of education, they will hide behind the State Department of Education and say you really don't need to know all the things that we're spending money on -- we report not to you but to the State Department of Education. Have you run into that issue?

MATT GALLIGAN: I've not run into that in South Windsor. I've been lucky with my new superintendent. We get along, you know, real well. But, I would say that if you look at the budget that is presented to the town council, it is much less
detailed than the budget that I would present to the public. And I think that's one of the things now that, if the public was more involved and knew exactly where their dollars were being spent, I think they would have to get a little bit more precise in the detailing of their budget. People would be asking more questions.

What I find is, we go to public hearings, and the board does the budget, and we have one public hearing or joint public hearing, and the only thing that happens is people come and yell at the town council. Those who wanna see it increase, don't touch the board, don't do this -- and it becomes really a fiasco, and you're not getting down to the weeds of what really you're spending your money on.

REP. ZAWISTOWSKI (61ST): Sometimes a fiasco has a purpose, but anyway, I have other questions, but I'm going to actually refer -- defer to the other representatives who would like to ask them. Thank you very much.

SENATOR CASSANO (4TH): Thank you. Madam Chair.

REP. MCCARTHY VAHEY (133RD): Thank you, Mr. Chair. Mr. Galligan, thank you for being here today. Just to follow up on what Representative Zawistowski was saying in terms of the presentation of the board of ed budget to the town council. I know in my town, we're really blessed with a board of ed who does a very thorough job, and their budget book is, I would say, probably just as sick if not sicker than the town budget book. And certainly, the number that goes into the town budget is a single line item, but we've had a series of hearings and conversations,
and I wondered if you could just elaborate a little bit on what happens in the town in terms of your hearing process and what kind of detail you're getting in your community from the board of education.

MATT GALLIGAN: Well, we do have a public hearing on the board budget, and we have a separate public hearing on the town side of the budget. And basically, you know, we, as I said, the superintendent and I, we work on -- we're fortunate, the two of us work on our budgets together. It was not -- not like that in the previous area, where we did a lot of strategic planning and said we're the two leading CEOs here and we really need to make this work for everybody.

So, the detail is not -- the board of ed does have a detailed budget for their staff and what they do, but that is not presented to the town council. As I came here today, it's probably a budget that's about maybe that thick that goes to the town council, which is really just a snapshot of different -- the elementary school and things like that. It's not more detailed, but I give 'em a binder, you know, of everything that's in there. So, that's why we have a lot of questions going back and forth as to how they're spendin' the money all the time, which you just keep goin' around and around and around, and the bottom line is that they can only cut the bottom line. They can't say, I don't want that program. It just doesn't work. I just think there are times, if you look in some other communities and, you know, being a member of CCM, where people complain that, you know, they just go back and forth and they fight over these things, and sometimes a finance board or
a town council will just say well cut a million dollars out, we don't care. And then you start hurting programming. And then it starts that they're gonna cut out the sports. And they're gonna cut out the baseball, we're gonna cut out the football, we're gonna cut out all that stuff, and it creates all this controversy in a town, where if they both did it separately you wouldn't have that.

REP. MCCARTHY VAHEY (133RD): And actually that is my second question, [laughing] which is -- we can use the word fighting or controversy or maybe we could say negotiation, right. [Laughing] We have to balance, and I -- I don’t come from a board of ed background. I was on our board of selectman in Fairfield, and it is a balance between the services that we need to provide that are financed on the municipal side versus what we wanna do to invest in our students and our children. But, you've been in both situations, and that tension, I would imagine, exists both places, whether it was in the separate taxing districts and now here in Connecticut. Can you speak to that? How is it --

MATT GALLIGAN: Sure, there is no tension.

REP. MCCARTHY VAHEY (133RD): Is that tension really better in the New York type model than in the --

MATT GALLIGAN: In the New York model, we never had tension because we all had our own wherewithal to talk to the public and produce our budgets separately and convince the public as to what they wanna do with their business and what they wanna do with their service. I never had to worry about, on the board side, having somebody come to a -- on the
town side and say, well, you know what, we wanna put more money in the board; therefore, Matt, you can't have your five police officer, or you gotta get rid of the equipment, or you gotta rid of this. And then, there was this -- there was this push to move the money, and then everybody later on says, hey, how come your not plowing, you know, Avery Street. Well, you know, you cut -- you cut my budget to put it in some other area, and that -- that's a problem. We didn't have that problem in New York. We had great relationships between the board of ed and our police department. Everything just ran naturally and ran the same. But, coming here, my first year I remember being threatened when I thought they should've taken somethin' out, and it was, well, we're gonna get rid of the football team, or we're gonna get rid of this, and it was really -- and that was never gonna happen. It was never gonna happen. But to create that and get the community stirred up was ridiculous. And that doesn't happen in New York.

REP. MCCARTHY VAHEY (133RD): Well, like Representative -- thank you for that answer -- and like Representative Zawistowski, I do have other questions. I'll make one comment briefly before I turn it back over the Chair because I know there are other speakers, and we'll be continuing this conversation throughout today. But, I think one of the things that I've heard about and have heard from board of ed members in my own community and elsewhere is that the way that we have things set up now is that it allows our board of education to retain their focus on the educational policies, on the outcomes for children, and certainly, I know in my own community, they're very cognizant of the
finances, but their primary focus really is that. And we have a board of finance and a board of selectman who help negotiate that financial piece. But I thank you so much for being here today, and I look forward to further conversation. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

SENATOR CASSANO (4TH): Thank you. Representative Arnone.

REP. ARNONE (58TH): Thank you. So, I've had the pleasure of working on both sides of BOE, town council. We don't have referendums for our town council to pass the budget for both sides.

MATT GALLIGAN: Same in South --

REP. ARNONE (58TH): So, where I have a problem with this, and it's a huge problem, is when you drop the budgets out, which we don't do in Connecticut we -- for the most part -- we vote on one budget for the entire town. When you drop the education budget out of the town-side budget, and you said it yourself, you've gotten the cuts to protect the school side. And we do that quite often. We'll pull back on the municipal end to make sure that we fund our schools properly.

So, once you start pitting a referendum of one class against another, young against old, parents and non-parents in a referendum, I can see budgets never -- three, four votes in school budgets -- I think the way we do things here in a Connecticut are a great way to do things as a whole. And I as a councilman as well as a board of ed member know that we're workin' together for the whole, for the whole of the
town. It's not us versus them, and that's what really scares me with these proposals is it's gonna be us versus them. So now we're gonna have -- instead of the arguments being behind the scenes with the board of ed and the town council, it's gonna be parents against grandparents, parents with no kids against parents with kids. So, that's what fears me is the chaos that'll happen in the community. We take that buffer now, and I'm proud we do. Under this system, that scares the life out of me.

MATT GALLIGAN: Well, as I said before, if you go on the State Education Department, in New York State in 2018, there were 680 school districts of which 98.9 percent of them their budgets passed, and it's been like that every year. And it's the one -- 10 to 16 that was left was because they went over the cap. So, I think people are, you know, much more intelligent locally and fiscally responsible, where they will come out, where they will talk about it, but they should be talkin' about the school budget with the school people, and the town budget with the town council. And then, therefore, we'd be able to have the wherewithal, each of us, to take care of our education and to take care of the needs of the town, when it comes to police, fire, and everything else.

I mean, next year, I hope to put three police officers, but I've been tryin' to do that for the last eight years, you know. And what happens is -- well, you know, we gotta get that roof done over on the board of ed, we gotta do this, we gotta -- well, Matt, can you wait another year? Can you wait another year? And then somebody turns around and
says, hey how come I didn't have a medical assist there the other night? You know, that's what happens. And from my side, when people come down, the council succumbs to helping the board of education more than helpin' the town side. So, let us go out on our own and do what we're supposed to do and get it done. And, I think that -- that makes it fair for everybody.

REP. ARNONE (58TH): Thank you, just one last comment. That's why we had to go to the caps here in Connecticut -- because we couldn't pass referendums. They were constantly going on and on and on, especially in selecting former governments. It was not unheard of to go to three and four referendums, and we would solve our budget on the state side before our locals did, which is unheard of too. So, that's -- again -- that's -- welcome to Connecticut.

MATT GALLIGAN: And, you know, and the thing is is that if you did -- I mean, right now you have some people do referendums, some are done by boards of education. I mean, you can make it a local option as to what the local municipality wants to do. You don't have to say everybody has to be referendum. Make it a local option. ["Thank you" in background]

SENATOR CASSANO (4TH): Senator Champagne followed by Representative Haines.

SENATOR CHAMPAGNE (35TH): Thanks, Matt, for comin' in today. You know, I think one of the points being made here is every town is different. And we all work in a different way, different fashion. In Vernon, where I'm the Mayor, we actually have a lot
of cooperation between the town and the school, and we have what we call Shared Services. And what we're trying to do is we're actually sharing all non-education services, and we're expanding that, and we continue to expand that. We have a great relationship between the superintendent and myself. In fact, we had our meeting yesterday on Shared Services. We share IT. We share maintenance. We share -- well, we're in the process of doing human resources and the finance, and once all those come together, you know, we're looking at cutting costs, putting new programs into place, so that both sides are gonna save a lot of money. So, we work a little different, and for this law -- I don’t support this law because of that. ["Okay" in background] I don't want anything interfering with what we're bringing together and we're coming together. I wish -- you know, but I think every town's found a way to make it work. And as long as we continue to go in the direction we're going, I don't want somebody coming in and saying, you know what, what you're doing's working, I know that, but I wanna divide it. So, it wouldn't work for me right now, and I'd like to continue on. I know there's a little different relationship with your board of ed, obviously, but if you could get them to work with you and start combining services, I think you'd understand where I'm comin' from.

MATT GALLIGAN:  We're only down to three more. Three more to get done, then that's that. We've been doing that for a long time.

SENATOR CHAMPAGNE (35TH):  Excellent. And once you do that, you don't wanna start dividing it up again.
It's just gonna cost the taxpayers more money. All right. Thank you.

SENATOR CASSANO (4TH): Thank you, Senator. Representative Haines.

REP. HAINES (34TH): Thank you, Mr. Chair. Just a quick question. I have three towns in my district. One of the towns, I have just a small piece of it, but of the two towns that I cover the whole town, one has a charter and one is run by board of selectman process. The board of selectman process town passed their budget 100 percent, first time. They have a board of finance. They oversee what's going on with the board of ed. It worked out great. They're very fiscally conservative. They do a good job. They work very well together.

On the charter side, they have two separate budgets and two separate groups, and the last year, in particular, when the monies was pulled back from the towns and then brought back later, it was right around budget time. It was a very difficult time for towns, especially those who had two different budgets, tryin' to get them to pass. And the stalemate that went on in that other town, the education passed in the very beginning, flying colors, no problem, and then they pulled money back. So, the town was trying to, when the money came back, to try and fix it so they could give some of the money back to board of ed, who had already passed their budget fine but because monies were coming back they said, well, they had to fix the roof on the library, and you know, there are some town things, as you're talking about with the police officers there.
They held it for four votes. The education people came out and literally held that town hostage. It was a very difficult time for them. So, to have those two budgets, how does it work when you have a charter system and that happens? It sounds like from what this tax district idea is doing, it's kind of the same thing. And how is that -- is it different, or are we really talking about here's a perfect example of --?

MATT GALLIGAN: Well, I think what happened is the charter had its own taxing district. When the money came back, whatever was associated with it just would of went right back to them, and whatever was associated with the town would of went back to them, and they wouldn't have had that conflict because -- because your taxing district, it would be very clear that this is the amount of money I raised on the school side or the charter side, but they took $3 million dollars from me. And on the town side, maybe they took, you know, a million dollars from me. But, if it all came back, it would be very clear where the $3 million and the $1 million should be going back to those particular budgets because there will be an actual taxing district, and they'll have their own financial statements.

REP. HAINES (34TH): Okay. Thank you very much.

SENATOR CASSANO (4TH): Representative Dubitsky.

REP. DUBITSKY (47TH): Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Thank you for coming in. It seemed to me from the testimony you've given and the responses to the other questions that there -- and correct me if I'm
wrong -- there seemed to be three main reasons why you appear to be supporting this. One is that the town is getting pressure and is being put in a tough situation that it doesn't feel comfortable, two -- that you need to balance two different budgets, one of which you don't really know that much about, and three is transparency to have the townspeople get more involved and know more about the school budget. Did I got those right?

MATT GALLIGAN: Yep, you got those right.

REP. DUBITSKY (47TH): Is there anything else?

MATT GALLIGAN: Well, I think there's some other things that the town could be aware of, and I'll give you a prime example when it comes to labor. A couple of years ago, the school board came in with a labor contract, which the town felt they didn't wanna pass. So, they voted against it. They sent it back. So, what did the superintendent do? They had a stipulated arbitration agreement and sent back the same agreement and we were stuck with it. So, there are things that have been happening on the board side, and then what happens is the people come out and blame the town council. They're not doing something about that, which they had no power to do. So then, it's like the teachers' pension. You know, now we're gonna have municipalities pay for teachers' pensions. We had -- we didn't negotiate those contracts. We didn't do that, and so where you gonna put that? You're gonna put that on the town side of the budget where the pension costs are associated. So, it's items like that, where there's staff that are feeling like they're the second-class citizens, and yet we still have the same obligation
to keep it down and you play it safe. So, by segregating it out, everybody is gonna be responsible for what they're supposed to be responsible for.

REP. DUBITSKY (47TH): Okay. Well, I appreciate that answer. I'm concerned that -- that the purpose of this is to make it more comfortable for town staff, and that we're not really looking -- none of those -- none of the three issues that you've discussed, nor the latter thing that you just discussed, addresses the pocketbooks of the taxpayers, which is one of my main concerns. You've got a town now that is in constant conflict, as you seem to indicate, with the town and the school in order to balance a budget. If each side had their own taxing power, what in the world would prevent just massive increases on both sides?

MATT GALLIGAN: Because it's a state statute if you're going to do this, which I told you because it's not in there. You need to have a -- a tax limit or cap.

REP. DUBITSKY (47TH): Okay, so let's say you have a cap. You have a three percent cap. So, every year, both budgets are gonna go up by three percent.

MATT GALLIGAN: Well, right now, in the past, some of these budgets have gone up five and eight percent, but the town budget's been cut back to zero. I mean, so -- I mean, this is -- this is my point. If everybody is on their own separate scale, then you have to justify what your budget is.
REP. DUBITSKY (47TH): Well, just so you know, I sit on my town's board of finance, so I'm familiar with this tension. It would seem to me -- is there no other way to address these three concerns -- the pressure, the balancing, and the transparency -- than giving the -- than separating out the school and mandating that every school district in the state is going to be a separate taxing district.

MATT GALLIGAN: Well, I think then, what you could do, which is probably not gonna be acceptable either, is to allow the town side to have more say in how you -- in your labor negotiations and your pension costs. I mean, on my side of the budget right now, we don't pay for health going out the door. Our pensions are based upon base pay, not with all the overtime. We have high deductible plans that we do. We have all sorts of things to keep our costs down, but I can't tell the board of education to do that. And if they did that, there'd be millions of dollars to be saved.

REP. DUBITSKY (47TH): Okay, so if there were a bill that would give the town more say in how the school districts spent the money, you would support that over this?

MATT GALLIGAN: That -- I would say that not when it comes to programming, like whether you want a Latin class or art class, but I think there's some global issues of pensions and healthcare and things like that could be a lot done cheaper and more effective. And I can prove it on the town side that we've been there. A couple of years ago, it took me five years to convince the board of education to do health together and do it as a -- and save them $2
million dollars, but it took five years -- and the numbers were there -- and reluctance because they have their territory, so to speak, and that's what happens in this environment.

REP. DUBITSKY (47TH): Well, I would suggest that perhaps pursuing that avenue -- because this seems to me like just giving up and saying well, since I can't have any say, they're just gonna go off on their own. And I'm concerned from a taxpayer standpoint that now you're gonna have two taxing authorities with overlapping taxes essentially. You're gonna have two different people making assessments. Two different people, two -- two bureaucracies. Don't you -- do you see we've got two different bureaucracies to doing taxes.

MATT GALLIGAN: Well, that's the portion of the bill that I disagree with because, in the state of New York, we only had one assessor. We only had one collector of tax revenues. We did it all. We collected. It just gave them the ability to determine what the needs were of the school when it came to programming and came to educating kids.

REP. DUBITSKY (47TH): But it's still gonna cost twice as much 'cause there's two different people -- two different authorities, so a given assessor is gonna be doing work for two different entities now, they're gonna charge more.

MATT GALLIGAN: No, it's the same assessment. The assessor goes out -- whatever assessment we have right now, when they talk about assessing, what they're talking about, they're allowing the school district to come in based upon what the assessor's records are and say this is what we're gonna tax
that house for that portion of -- for school work. We -- we never had two assessors. We never had two tax collectors. It just doesn't work that way. We were the people who served them to make sure that those things got done.

REP. DUBITSKY (47TH): How would this work with the MBR?

MATT GALLIGAN: With the MBR?

REP. DUBITSKY (47TH): Yeah, the minimum budget requirement. If the school was able to -- had its power to tax as much as it wants subject to a cap that's not in the bill, what -- doesn't the MBR increase every year without any oversight?

MATT GALLIGAN: Well, the MBR -- I mean, yeah, the MBR does increase, but that's a whole issue by itself that this legislation could be tackling because I can show you that the MBR, in my mind, is not very -- a good item because what if a school district decides that they can reduce their costs, like Columbia did. They reduce their costs, and then they wind up being penalized on their ECS funding. I mean, that makes no sense either. So, I would say that that's a separate issue that needs to be attacked by itself.

REP. DUBITSKY (47TH): Okay, but short of attacking that, there would be nobody to keep track of the MBR, and it would just continually increase.

MATT GALLIGAN: Well, if you change the MBR to a two percent tax limitation, or whatever that -- I'm saying two percent only because I'm using New York,
it could be less -- you know, it'd be up to the state legislature -- would you really need the MBR at that point if you have a tax cap on those expenditures?

REP. DUBITSKY (47TH): Okay, well thank you. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

SENATOR CASSANO (4TH): All right. Thanks. Representative Zawistowski, you have one followup question?

REP. ZAWISTOWSKI (61ST): Yes, thank you, Mr. Chairman for the indulgence of a second time. Since you're relying on your New York experience in testifying on this bill, could you just tell us how the school districts are set up in New York? Are they by town? Are they by county? Or are they by some combination of the two?

MATT GALLIGAN: Well, they're not by county, but they are by town. For example, the town of Mamaroneck, you had the Mamaroneck School District, but it covered the town of Mamaroneck, the village of Mamaroneck, and the village of Larchmont. And then on the other side, you had the town of Rye and another portion of the village of Mamaroneck. So, they really went by district more than anything. So, they would call the Mamaroneck -- and the same with the city of Newburgh. It's called the City of Newburgh School District, but it encompasses the city, the town of Newburgh, the town of New Windsor, and portions of a town -- I forget what it was -- out a little bit further. So, they're really done by districts. By people voting for those districts.
REP. ZAWISTOWSKI (61ST): Mr. Chair, one last question on the same subject. About -- were they done by population size, or is there any other criteria that these districts were set up?

MATT GALLIGAN: It was basically by population and logistics -- how close these towns were to each other. 'Cause if you took the town of Mamaroneck, that's a big town, you had the village of Larchmont was in there and the village of Mamaroneck was inside that area. So that's why the Mamaroneck School District became the school district for those two villages.

REP. ZAWISTOWSKI (61ST): Okay. Thank you very much, and thank you, Mr. Chairman.

SENATOR CASSANO (4TH): Thank you. Matt, I won't ask you any questions, but just a couple comments. As you know well, I was either a mayor or deputy mayor for 26 years, and all of that time, we had a public hearing every year. I can honestly not recall one time where we had at least ten people at the public hearing, and -- and that's significant because as we elect people to office, those people come with a personality. And those personalities will either agree to work with others, or whatever it might be, but we can't regulate that or legislate that. I had a superintendent that, at one time, we were at loggerheads with everything. If one said A, the other said B, simple as that. And other superintendents where every other Friday, the Town Manager, Superintendent, the Mayor and others -- Minority Leader -- we would sit down, every other Friday, and we were a tag team, and it worked. It depends on the personalities, and that's one of the
things that's so difficult here because no matter what we try to do and create, it still has to be enforced by people. So, hopefully the message -- one of the things we need to do is get that kind of a message. We talk about sharing the services and working together.

We have to start within our own boundaries before we can worry about sharing with the next town or the town after that. If we can do it well within our own districts, then that's a step forwards. Appreciate our first hour bein' spent with you here -- you and Brendan.

MATT GALLIGAN: It's not Saturday.

SENATOR CASSANO (4TH): Hopefully we're not down to two per hour for the next --

MATT GALLIGAN: I apologize.

SENATOR CASSANO (4TH): So, I'll be waving a little more vigorously here and my Co-Chairman's gonna -- she pinches me now, so. [Crosstalk/laughing] John Salomone. Thank you, Matt.

MATT GALLIGAN: Thank you all very much for your time. Appreciate it. Thank you very much.

SENATOR CASSANO (4TH): Appreciate it. John. Welcome, John. Derry Gorski is next, and then Bob Valentine. We are -- we gotta start rotating though. We have used the first hour, so we need to rotate with the public, so I’m gonna have to -- After John, Johnny Carrier and Jim Perras.
[Crosstalk] Yeah, Bob, why don't you go 'cause I don't see John here.

BOB VALENTINE: Thank you, and thank you for the opportunity. So, I'm here today -- My name is Bob Valentine. I'm First Selectman of the town of Goshen and a member of the COST, on the COST Board of Directors, and also a member of CCM. I'm here today to speak on behalf of COST in COST'S opposition to House Bill 7319. And I won't read the whole testimony, having just listened to all of the arguments back and forth, but I would say that I'm not, and my colleagues are not, convinced that this proposal, this bill, would actually do what it's intended or what we think it's intended to do, which is to kind of control some of the costs that are associated with boards of education budgets.

And I would say to the committee that there are a lot of different flavors, if you will, in the state of Connecticut. So, your Co-Chair talks about a board of finance, board of selectman. So, Goshen is a small town. We have a regional school system, and so we do get a detailed budget from our board of education, and I've done this for 14 years now and so that varies, as everybody knows, depending on who the superintendent is and how detailed it is, but we do get those. And I think that the best way, if we want to control costs generally for education, there are other things that we can do. I mean, I think there are a multitude of mandates that are put on boards of education that actually drive some of the costs that we deal with, but working cooperatively with our boards of education, working cooperatively, try to share services. In addition, an example, our board of education and I are currently working on
leasing town lands so that they can put a solar array in and save some money on electricity. There are a lot of things that we can do, and I'm not certain that this bill, nor are my colleagues certain that this bill is going to achieve those goals.

So, I'd ask, you know, maybe we take another look at how we can go about saving costs in education. But I don't think pitting boards of education and municipalities against one another through the budget process is the best way to go about doin' that.

SENATOR CASSANO (4TH): Thank you. Are there any questions? No. Thank you very much.

BOB VALENTINE: Thank you very much.


MICHAEL CRISS: Hi. Thank you for having me here today, committee members. My name is Michael Criss. I'm First Selectman for the town of Harwinton. I'm a member of COST, CCM, and also the Northwest Hills Council of Governments Legislative Chair. And, I'm just here on behalf of my town, community, and the Region Ten School District. We're opposing bill 7319 in its entirety the way it's written.
We feel that this bill eliminates the role of the town in developing and approving budgets, school budgets, education budgets, and town budgets in a manner that we're -- we are working together now with. We do have open budget hearings, not only the regional budget but we also have open budget hearings on the town budget, where residents come in and look at line-by-line expenditures on a regular basis. And we vet those expenditures out publicly. We have a multitude of those before May, and then right around May 7 is when we hold a referendum for the regional school district budget, where all the taxpayers in both communities, Harwinton and Burlington, get an opportunity to vote on that budget. There's been times where it's been voted down. There's been times when it's been voted through, but it's a good working relationship that we currently have with the board of ed. We're not a charter. We don't have a city council.

This bill would basically take away the authority that the town has now to work with the board of education in order to control expenditures. We, as first selectmen, are allowed to go up to the board of education. We address the board of education. We let them know the needs of our community, our poverty rates, our median household incomes. We use a lot of that data to help the board of education because they really are experts in education, where the towns come from the standpoint where we have our boards of finance and we have individuals that are more in tuned with taxing, assessing, and taking care of how we pay for the items that we need in both budgets.
And we have a good balance between the communities. We have a great partnership with our partner in Burlington, we have a great partnership with the Region Ten, and we work together to control that. We believe that this bill would take away that ability of the municipalities to work with the board of ed, and it would allow the ability of levying taxes and collecting and borrowing and everything with the region. Where that causes a problem is you have a board of ed that's taken up by membership and it's by population. So, we have six votes that are in Burlington and four votes in Harwinton. If this was to separate out as a separate taxing authority, how -- there's no mechanism in the way this is proposed that would allow for proper representation from both communities, and then how would that tax be levied across both communities when there's such a dispersion in -- in population. But also, how would you go about collecting it. Currently, right now, our system is not broken. It doesn't -- it does work. We levy the tax based on a combination of the two budgets. When we present the town budget, the school budget has either passed or failed at that point, and that is a separate line within our budget so that the taxpayers can see the difference between the school budget and the town budget. And we do project both mill rates, a mill rate without the school and mill rate with the school, if the school had no increase or the school had an increase.

We work very well to stay within our two percent and three percent as a whole without sacrificing our services or needs. We plan projects. We put money aside in capital repairs in savings accounts that we can pay for things. The town of Harwinton has not
bonded since the school did a major renovation back in 2008, and I'm proud to say that we have no debt. We continually save money, put aside, and we plan for our future together. And, giving them the full authority to have these two different mill rates within the community, I think would only -- not only cause the animosity that we currently don't have, but I think it would cause two budgets, not only the local town budget but also the budget of board of education to grow out of control. And I think right now it has good checks and balances in there, and I think it -- the way we have it right now, we have a greater collaboration. If you take this bill, and you propose it the way it is, first of all it's not uniform. It's based on 15,000 or under, so there is a limit in there. Small communities would suffer the most from it. We come from a small rural community, and we would suffer the most from this. And I think that when you divide the communities, it's unnecessary. There's no reason to do that. So, I would just say that this is just a duplication of services, and again, we're opposed to this bill in its entirety.

SENATOR CASSANO (4TH): Thank you. Representative Zawistowski.

REP. ZAWISTOWSKI (61ST): Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and thank you for coming here from Harwinton today.

MICHAEL CRISS: Thank you.

REP. ZAWISTOWSKI (61ST): You brought up something that I was going to ask you about anyway. You mentioned a proportional representation on the board of ed for your regional school district, and that's...
something that I am concerned about if something like this bill came through because you've got a deal worked out that works out for your area.

MICHAEL CRISS: It does.

REP. ZAWISTOWSKI (61ST): And this would definitely create a lot of wrinkles in that. Question for you. You're -- I know that each regional school district does have some differences. Do you have separate elementary schools in each town?

MICHAEL CRISS: It's all under the Region Ten umbrella. We have an elementary school in Burlington, an elementary school in Harwinton, and that is K through 4 in both towns, and then fifth through 12 is up at the middle school/high school.

REP. ZAWISTOWSKI (61ST): Okay, but they're still under the same board of education, is that correct?

MICHAEL CRISS: Same umbrella, yep, and only one superintendent.

REP. ZAWISTOWSKI (61ST): Okay, what would you see as your primary problem in dealing with -- if something like this were enacted? What would you see as the biggest issue that you would have in your school district?

MICHAEL CRISS: Well, I think the biggest issue in the school district is taxation without representation between the communities because there's no set parameters, you know, detailin' here on how that would be decimated between the two towns -- disseminated. And I think that the reality is is that taxpayers are used to seeing it presented a
certain way and having the ability to approach not only the board of selectmen but the board of ed to share their concerns about each budget independently. And I think it takes away the voice of the voters and the people in our community to have that flexibility.

And I think that it also -- it's gonna create an uncontrolled cost, where -- and I would agree with your comments earlier that when you don't do zero-based budgeting and you have a two percent or three percent cap, people just naturally, human nature, are gonna say, well I get three percent this year, I get two percent this year. We went to zero-based budgeting in 2011 in the town, and we've saved hundreds of thousands over the years just by doing that because people are no longer just adding two percent 'cause that's the cap. And I think that taking the power away from the residents and the oversight of the municipality in the regional budget is gonna be a real big problem to overcome, not only that, but just the logistics of setting up a separate taxing authority within our two small communities with such different demographics would be really hard to achieve.

REP. ZAWISTOWSKI (61ST): Okay. Thank you very much, and thank you, Mr. Chairman.

REP. DUBITSKY (47TH): Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Thank you for coming in.

MICHAEL CRISS: Thank you.

REP. DUBITSKY (47TH): So you're -- you're speaking on behalf of COST?
MICHAEL CRISS: COST and my community obviously. [Laughing]

REP. DUBITSKY (47TH): Okay, well thank you for that. You know, perhaps, you can answer a couple of my quick questions. This bill only appears to affect districts of 15,000 or less. Do you know, in the state, how many districts are 15,000 or more? Like which towns does it affect and which does it not?

MICHAEL CRISS: I don't have the number off the top of my head, but I can tell you that there were six communities listed in the bill as exceptions, and that was Hartford, Waterbury, Bridgeport, and there were three others there in -- three others in there that were except from it.

REP. DUBITSKY (47TH): Do you have any idea why?

MICHAEL CRISS: My personal feelings? [Laughing] My personal feelings -- it just sounds like a big vacuum from other districts to take money that maybe things are running well in those districts. And in talking with many of the small communities, I know in our 21-community town, we have -- we all have a very good relationship, same type of government, same type of relationship with our boards of ed, and we don't have this infighting stuff. And we just see it as an opportunity to basically allow -- why they're eliminating those is basically the flexibility to continue to operate the way they have been operating. In some way, it looks more towards the regionalization of where you get regionalization of tax assessors, tax office assessors. I think
this is just a first step in a long laundry list of things that we have been tryin' to prevent over the years because each community is different, and each community works well together.

And I think that we have to find out what works with our community and have those discussions, and say, okay, what works for some of these communities works not in some of these communities. But when -- you know, I heard the gentleman come up here earlier, Matt, come up and talk about the council and the board of ed arguing and everything else. Well, that seems like maybe that would be a good fit for their community. And maybe it would help resolve some issues. I think it's only gonna perpetuate issues going forward in any community that this is instituted in. But, if you're looking for oversight, I would focus on the communities that you're having those issues with and focus on -- and gear it towards those communities and say, okay, these communities now are gonna be the communities that we're gonna go ahead and we're gonna focus on. And we're gonna -- we're gonna create this separate taxing authority so that we can better analyze the educational budget.

But, where towns like ours and up in the northwest corner and everything else, in these small communities across the state, we have that oversight in place already, so we don't have that rub of city council and all these layers of bureaucracy. You know, the taxpayers are the ones with the voice. It goes to referendum. It passes or fails, and then if it fails, it goes back. And the board of finance and the board of ed look at it and say how can we
make this work and still provide a quality education for our students.

REP. DUBITSKY (47TH): Well, I thank you, and I should note that the model that was presented by the Town Manager of South Windsor was the New York model, and right now Connecticut has the second highest taxes, state and local taxes, of any state in the nation. The only state that's higher is New York. And a large portion, 80 percent or more in some towns of our town budgets goes to schools. So, I would just -- I would agree with you that this isn't the right way to go. Thank you. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

SENATOR CASSANO (4TH): Representative McCarthy Vahey.

REP. MCCARTHY VAHEY (133RD): Thank you, Mr. Chair, and thank you for being here with us today. And I would further note, thank you for your young advocates who you have with you as well -- very impressive.

MICHAEL CRISS: That's my muscle. [Laughing]

REP. MCCARTHY VAHEY (133RD): That's wonderful. I think it's wonderful, and it helps us remember who we're talking about here today. I just wanna also thank you -- more of a comment than anything -- for just reminding us, and I think this is the gist of the discussion in this committee in hearing the various impacts, and communities certainly are different, as was pointed out. We have various forms of government and systems in place. So, thank you for taking the time to be with us today.
MICHAEL CRISS: Thank you for having me. [Background talking] He is still with us. This will -- he'll be retiring in 2020, so.

SENATOR CASSANO (4TH): [inaudible-01:52:29] of schools that we met with every other Friday in Manchester before I went -- we lost him to you. [Laughing] So, that was a great, great acquisition for you guys.

MICHAEL CRISS: He is.

SENATOR CASSANO (4TH): Thank you. Thanks for comin' in.

MICHAEL CRISS: Thank you very much for havin' me.

SENATOR CASSANO (4TH): Jim Perras and Johnny Carrier, followed by Representative Leslee Hill. [Background talking]

JIM PERRAS: Johnny Carrier will be with us in spirit, I'm sure.

SENATOR CASSANO (4TH): You can start, please.

JIM PERRAS: Chairman Cassano, Chairwoman McCarthy Vahey, Ranking Member Zawistowski, distinguished members of the Planning and Development Committee. Thank you for an opportunity to testify in strong support of Raised Senate Bill 1013, AN ACT CONCERNING SEWAGE DISPOSAL SYSTEMS AND ALTERNATIVE SEWAGE TREATMENT SYSTEMS.

My name is Jim Perras. I am the CEO of the Home Builders and Remodelers Association of Connecticut.
Our members are responsible for roughly 80 percent of all residential construction in Connecticut. You have my testimony, so I'll take this opportunity to summarize as quickly as I can and make myself available for questions.

If enacted, this bill would do two things. First, it would increase the capacity of traditional septic systems currently regulated by DPH from 7,500 gallons per day to 10,000 gallons per day. Second, it would require DPH to promulgate regulations for alternative treatment of septic systems and to begin regulating said systems with a capacity of 10,000 gallons per day or less. Larger systems would continue to be regulated by the DEEP.

So, traditional septic systems with a capacity greater than 7,500 gallons and alternative treatment septic systems regardless of scenarios -- excuse me, regardless of capacity are currently regulated by the DEEP. DEEP's processes are somewhat convoluted. Anecdotally I've heard of some sort of -- some nightmare scenarios in which developers have waited multiple years for approvals. There's no regulatory certainty, nor is there any predictability with the DEEP. Many developers will design projects in order to avoid entering into what I'd like to refer to as the abyss that is the DEEP regulatory authority. Because of current regulatory regime, many projects that would fall under the DEEP never see the light of day simply because of the expectation or fear that the DEEP would have the regulatory authority.

In contrast, the DPH regulates in a strict, fair, and transparent process. DPH has processes and protocols in place that allow for efficient and
thorough review of technical codes and standards by regulators with input from industry experts. Most importantly, approvals are rendered in a timely and predictable manner.

We don’t think that this legislation would be too onerous on DPH. As a matter of fact, I believe DPH currently regulates 90 percent, I believe, of septic systems that are out there today. So, with that being said, I think that for them to promulgate regs pertaining to alternative treatment septic systems, they really ought to just look to Massachusetts or Rhode Island where similar soils exist and geographic natures exist, and they could pretty much just utilize those regulations in order to help promulgate their own regulations. So -- that's it then. [Ringing/laughing]

SENATOR CASSANO (4TH): All right, before we go to Representative Arnone, a quick question -- the 7,500, do you know when that limit was established?

JIM PERRAS: I believe it was established in 2017. Prior to that, it was 5,000 gallons for about 30-some-odd years.

SENATOR CASSANO (4TH): So, it's only two years old. ["Um-hm" in background] Representative Arnone.

REP. ARNONE (58TH): Thank you, Mr. Chairman. So, with gallons and capacity -- so on a local level, a lot of the issue is septic systems now leaching into water, water courses, and rivers, especially as they age. So, the more we -- the more volume we allow in future, the more sewers we have to extend. And we've seen this in lake sides, where lakes have
polluted -- where residents have polluted lakes and the municipalities have to come in ten years later, and they have to put in -- 20 years later they have to put in sewers. So, the capacity issue is an issue. Just having more septic systems is an issue, especially in rural America because of what -- now what we're seeing is going into surface water. Switching departments -- don't see a big problem with that 'cause, like you said, the DPH is doing a phenomenal job now with the residential side. So, there is a break off with septic systems and then actually small treatment plants. So, when you also increase the gallons that you're allowing to go into surface -- surface ground, you can also now start looking at -- that's why DEEP has -- they have a split off -- it's 'cause now you can go into a small treatment facility, something you would see at a truck stop, a rural truck stop where they have a small treatment facility. So, how do you -- where are you goin' with that? Are you keeping off septic with this, or are you saying that you'll look at small treatment plants too with this increased volume?

JIM PERRAS: To clarify, my understanding is that while this legislation would give DPH the authority to regulate septic systems of 10,000 gallons per day or less, septic systems that are larger already exist, and they do exist and they're currently regulated by the DEEP. So, it's -- it's not so much about expanding capacities, it's about just allowing the regulatory authority to be under one agency rather than the other.

REP. ARNONE (58TH): But I see DEEP is looking at it differently than maybe DHP may. So, that's --
that's an issue too, where DEEP may look at these and that could be the problem for the length of time that you're waiting for approvals is -- is there's issues with now the increased volume of septage on land. So, I'm not sure how that -- how you peel that away.

JIM PERRAS: I don't know if one necessarily correlates with the other. I think there are a number of reasons why DEEP might be slow to get approvals. Again, DPH currently regulates about 90 percent of all existing septic systems to date. ["Right, yes" in background]. They have a very proficient method and system by which they regulate. By contrast, DEEP may not be as thorough because they don't handle quite as much as the DPH does, so.

REP. ARNONE (58TH): So, there'd be work against both sides -- 'cause like I said, my concern is is DEEP regulating that many gallon small treatment plants, and you know, by enabling this to go over to a new agency that may not be familiar with a small package treatment plant that could fit into this 10,000 gallons. We need to probably work together on that. ["Sure" in background] If there's some way to kinda make sure that that's not going to happen.

JIM PERRAS: I think, to be -- to be frank, Representative, that these small treatment centers are regulated differently than alternative treatment septic systems. ["Right" in background] So, I think that's a whole host of different issues pertaining to nitrogen levels and things of that nature that don’t necessarily compare or are
relevant with pertaining to alternative treatment septic systems.

REP. ARNONE (58TH): Great, so we'll keep that open -- the conversation?

JIM PERRAS: Certainly. Absolutely.

REP. ARNONE (58TH): Thank you.

SENATOR CASSANO (4TH): Leslee Hill. Representative Hill, followed by Donna Hamzy-Carrocia.

REP. HILL (17TH): Thank you, Co-Chairs Senator Cassano and Representative McCarthy Vahey, Ranking Member Zawistowski, and distinguished members of the Planning and Development Committee. I'm Leslee Hill. I'm the representative for the 17th district, Canton and Avon.

I really was so compelled to testify on -- against House Bill 7319, AN ACT CONCERNING FISCAL INDEPENDENCE OF SCHOOL DISTRICTS. I come from the I think somewhat unique perspective of being both a former Board of Education Chair in Canton and also the former First Selectman of Canton. So, I come here representing two small towns, Canton being a very small town with just about 10,000 residents and 1,500 students in its school district. And, you know, I'm struck by the name of this bill talks about fiscal independence of school districts, which sounds like something that I should really be supporting, but there's nothing in this bill that I can support.
I am well familiar with the fact that one of the best distinctions between budgeting at a small town level and budgeting at the state level is that our voters, our taxpayers, vote on our budgets. And the work that we have to do -- the outreach that we have to have with our constituents to develop budgets that will marry together the priorities of both parents in a school district, seniors who are living on a fixed income, local business owners -- to get all of those people heading in one direction and actually vote to approve a municipal budget takes a great amount of work, a great amount of outreach, and it works really well in our town, in Canton. Our superintendent holds coffeehouses in residents' homes to talk to them about their concerns about the budget. We have budget hearings that are -- we get a fair amount of public participation in. And because of the feedback we get on our school budget and on our town budgets, we've answered the call for greater savings, and our town, the board of selectman and the board of education work together to find savings. The best example I can give you of that is that in the last two years, the town and the board of ed came together to join our finance department, which many small towns around the state are starting to do now. It was done with the hope of finding greater efficiencies but especially finding cost savings, which we have successfully done.

I think at this point in time -- I also serve on the Education Committee -- we're talking about wanting to break down silos. I view this as creating an impenetrable silo and actually setting that up to create a bunker of school districts that aren't working with their communities, that can stand
apart, and not necessarily take into consideration the vital feedback of the parents and the taxpayers who are supporting these school districts. So, I'm -- I'm strongly opposed to this bill. I think it sends us in the exact wrong direction from what we should be doing. I think we should be looking, as one of the prior speakers said, to zero-based budgeting. That's what we employ in our town. We work closely with the board of finance. [Ringing] So, I know -- I know I'm out of town. I'm happy to take your questions, but I really urge you to reconsider this -- this bill. Thank you.

SENATOR CASSANO (4TH): Thank you for your testimony. Are there questions?

REP. ZAWISTOWSKI (61ST): Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Everybody who's come in here to testify -- and we will have some additional ones -- against this bill have different perspectives. They have different sizes of school districts they're dealing with, different setups, whether regional or free-standing, and I wanna ask you the same question I just asked the last speaker. It is what do you see as the absolute primary issue that you find with this bill?

REP. HILL (17TH): The primary issue I see with this bill is that it breaks down the good cooperative relationship that a board of education and a town can and should develop. I mean, that's been my experience as -- as both an educational and a town-side leader in Canton with developing a strong working relationship between those two sides and remembering that we're one community. This absolutely robs the community of that sense and, to me, pushes the board of ed against the town, rather
than encouraging them to find ways to work together. I think more towns should be looking to the model of working together to find cost savings first and foremost. Before we talk about bringing school districts together, we should be talking about getting the town and the board of ed working together.

REP. ZAWISTOWSKI (61ST): Thank you very much. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

REP. HAINES (34TH): Thank you for coming in, Representative Hill. Can you talk a little bit more about your finance departments? You had mentioned that the board of education and the board -- or the selectmen -- talk a little bit about that. I'm a little confused on that one.

REP. HILL (17TH): Sure, so we had talked, both when I was on the board of ed and then when I became first selectman, we had had conversation about the idea of being able to join the finance departments together. And it came to pass that we had a vacancy on the school side. The school finance officer position was vacant. The superintendent filled that role himself for a year, while we engaged CREC to do a study, an analysis, of what those merged finance departments would look like. They produced a report for us, a very well done report, came out, interviewed all of our finance staff on both sides, put together an org chart to see what the new department would look like. We formed a subcommittee, combined -- made of representatives from both the board of ed and the board of selectmen with some board of finance oversight as well to -- to really -- to study it, and it took us a year to
study what it would like. We made some changes from the org chart we got from CREC because we knew more about the personalities involved and how we could best see this working.

But, at the end of the day, we had complete buy-in from the board of ed, complete buy-in from the board of selectmen and the board of finance. We put the CFO position -- we posted that and hired a new CFO for the town. We're very fortunate to have someone who really saw our vision of bringing these departments together and has done a remarkable job. So, we saved a highly compensated full-time position from the board of ed. There will be some investment we're gonna have to make in software. We're getting ready to merge two separate software systems into one, and we had to pick which software system is gonna better.

But it's been a really good collaborative effort, and I think that effort provides an underpinning for the entire budget process. When the school side and the town side sees that we're working together, it helps break down those barriers between, you know, this constituent group wants this, while this constituent group wants that. It's laid a good foundation. There's been cost savings, and this is the first budget cycle that they're going through with the fully integrated, combined department, and we're already seeing enormous benefit there.

REP. HAINES (34TH): Thank you very much. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

REP. BAKER (124TH): Thank you, Mr. Chair. Thank you for coming out here and sharing your
information. Just a couple of questions for you. Okay, you said that there were like about a little under, what is it, 1,500 you said -- 15?

REP. HILL (17TH): Ah -- 1,550 students in Canton and about 3,200, I believe, in Avon.

REP. BAKER (124TH): Okay. So, are there any -- any private schools in that -- in that district, or any kind of charter schools in those -- those particular towns?

REP. HILL (17TH): There are. There is -- there's a private, at least one large private school, Avon Old Farms School in Avon. We also -- Avon hosts one of the CREC magnet schools, and we have a number of private high schools in the area, in Simsbury and the surrounding towns.

REP. BAKER (124TH): Do you provide any -- any essentials or like, you know, busing or anything to those private schools?

REP. HILL (17TH): I -- I don't know the answer to that off the top of my head, Representative. I believe in -- Avon does because Avon does have schools within their -- within their locale that they do need to provide transportation to. Canton does not have any private schools that we would have to provide transportation to.

REP. BAKER (124TH): Okay. So, have you -- have you heard of any issues that they might have in terms of the amount of funding and any concerns of there not being enough funding in terms of to provide the busing transportation?
REP. HILL (17TH): That's not something that I've heard about specifically in this budget cycle, Representative, but I have not fully looked at the budgets that the towns are working on for this year.

REP. BAKER (124TH): Yeah, okay. In your past history, in terms of working with -- as a board of ed member -- what would you say was one of your biggest obstacles in terms of budgeting and stuff that you were able to work out -- to make this, the process that you said -- that collaborative process work so smoothly, as you say?

REP. HILL (17TH): Okay, so are you --? Let me just make sure I understand the question. Are you talking about the biggest obstacle in merging the finance departments or ["Yes, yes" in background] overall in budgeting on the board of ed. In merging the finance departments? I think it was getting buy-in, and I would say we were very fortunate because we got buy-in from our personnel very quickly.

But, of course, when you're talking about combining departments in a town and you've got an outside consultant, CREC, coming in to do that study, there was some anxiety that that caused. People were concerned about their jobs. We had to manage that, and we were fortunate that we had good personnel in place, and we were able to manage those concerns. We did have some turnover. There were a couple of people who chose to leave. We then refilled those positions. We had to change job descriptions for -- for some people, and we had to ask people to cross-train. But, we were -- we were very fortunate, I
think, because the leaders, the educational leader and the town-side leadership, were so committed this that we were able to get buy-in.

REP. BAKER (124TH): Were you able to do any -- any shared responsibilities, like on the public facilities side or on the maintenance side?

REP. HILL (17TH): We're looking at that. That is something that -- that has also been thought -- has been considered, the idea of working with the custodial staff and the DPW staff, but because they're separate bargaining units, that's something that we've pursued yet. But, you know, in a town of 10,000 people, every penny counts. Every penny counts everywhere, but you know, we really hear it from our residents. And so, where there are opportunities to share in those -- those areas, I know that they're looking, you know, looking very hard at it.

REP. BAKER (124TH): Well, thank you for sharing that information with me.

REP. HILL (17TH): Thank you, Representative.

SENATOR CASSANO (4TH): Representative Baker, thanks for your questions. They're right on. I do have -- Representative Delnicki first. Go ahead.

REP. DELNICKI (14TH): One question -- and I'm asking you to think back to your municipal experience. If this were to occur, do you think it would increase the cost of budgeting, reduce the cost of budgeting, or keep it about the same?
REP. HILL (17TH): Oh, I think it would absolutely increase it. I don’t see how it couldn't. Because I'm just thinking about -- just talking about the personnel side -- who would do this function? And I heard the prior testimony about how would you work out on the assessment side, the tax collection side. The way I read the bill presently is it puts all that responsibility on the board of education. There's nothing in there about joining, you know, those functions with the town side that's already performing tax collection services. And then, I can also -- you know, I do have concern about taking the oversight away from the board of finance. The board of finance function is critical in setting our budgets. I mean, I'll say our board of ed typically comes in with fixed cost increases that are -- that are significant. Our budgetary increase at the end of that is always lower. I mean, we've had zero percent budget increases in the past years -- low single-digit budget increases. I don't see how this could possibly help us drive our budget savings any lower. I can only see it increasing them.

REP. DELNICKI (14TH): Thank you for your answer. Thank you for coming out. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

SENATOR CASSANO (4TH): Madam Chair, Representative McCarthy Vahey.

REP. MCCARTHY VAHEY (133RD): Thank you, Mr. Chair, and thank you, Representative, for being here before us. I -- two things, I just wanted to comment that it is wonderful to hear about that collaboration between the town and the board of ed, and it's not always easily achieved. And as Senator Cassano pointed out earlier today, sometimes it's even
personality that can dictate that, so I commend your
community. And I did just wanna note as well, you
had asked us to reconsider this bill. We are
hearing this bill. This committee has not taken any
action or position, so ["I understand" in the
background] it's great to have your input here
today. Thank you. ["Thank you" in background]

SENATOR CASSANO (4TH): I do wanna offer
congratulations to you. A lot of things can be
merged easily, but the board of finance -- it always
made sense to me you have a director of finance on
both sides, and then there were savings, real
savings -- obviously it meant somebody was gonna
lose a job in the consolidation and so on. But to
be able to move forward on it was a coup because I
know many have tried it and just haven't been able
to accomplish it. I think, as elected officials,
all of us have had that frustration. I remember
right after I was first elected, driving down
Brookfield Street by the high school. And I looked
over and a guy was cuttin' the lawn -- and nothing -
- he's on a tractor out there cuttin' the football
field, this was still football season. And then I
get up to the school, and the town guys are up there
cuttin' the school side. So, you know, that kind of
duplication -- we can't afford to continue to let
that happen in our communities, and that's what your
merger did, and so it's a good example for others.
That's a big challenge to take on and
congratulations on that. Thank you.

REP. HILL (17TH): Thank you, Senator.

SENATOR CASSANO (4TH): Seein' no other questions.
Thank you.
REP. HILL (17TH): Thank you very much.

SENATOR CASSANO (4TH): Okay, we have -- next up is Donna Hamzy-Carrocia, Representative Hennessy, Cecil Thomas, and Representative Lavielle -- heads ups.

DONNA HAMZY-CARROCIA: Good afternoon, Chairs, members of the committee, it's good to see you all again. I am Donna Hamzy-Carrocia, and I am here representing the Connecticut Conference of Municipalities. I, unlike other speakers, will not be speaking on House Bill 7319 but other bills on your agenda. You all know that we've submitted testimony on a number of bills before you today, including the three that I plan on testifying or briefly touching on today.

The first bill is Senate Bill 1012, AN ACT CONCERNING CERTAIN MUNICIPAL TAX APPEAL AND CONTINGENCY AGREEMENTS FOR EXPERT TESTIMONY ON SUCH APPEALS. This is a perennial issue, as many of you on the P and D Committee know. We see this bill as a step in the right direction; however, we would ask the committee to amend this bill to not create an opportunity for CPAs but instead to prohibit contingency fee agreements in all these tax appeal proceedings. We'd also ask -- as was presented last year -- would ask that the committee provide substitute language that would allow for or would require that the party filing the appeal would furnish an appraisal of their own within 90 days of filing that appeal. And if they do not fulfill that requirement that there -- that would mean that there would be grounds for the appeal to be dismissed. We did present that language to the assessors last year, and I thought that that was a great way to
help to, you know, fight off some of these frivolous tax claims that have been an increasing problem for municipalities.

I have, as part of my testimony, cited two articles, one actually just recently that was published in the New Haven Register, and it -- and it goes into why this has become such as huge issue for municipalities and has really bogged down the tax appeal system, I think at that -- to the detriment of those, you know, residents who might be actually filing claims that, you know, are worthy of the -- of the appeal process.

House Bill 7208, POSTING OF LEGAL NOTICES. Again, another perennial issue. You guys are all aware. Our -- our position remains the same -- that we believe that in the age of technology, municipalities should be allowed to solely post legal notices and other advertisements on their website.

And also, House Bill 7318, THE UNIFORM RELOCATION ASSISTANCE ACT. We at CCM would add our support and echo the comments made by Speaker Sharkey and the town of Hamden. CCM is committed to continuing those conversations and believe that there should be some uniformity around what those roles and responsibilities are, so that towns can fulfill this obligation on the part of their residents, but that also there is some understanding amongst communities how -- how those roles should be met.

So, those are the three items that I wanted to testify briefly on today. I'll take any questions on any of the testimony we presented.
SENATOR CASSANO (4TH): Representative McCarthy Vahey.

REP. MCCARTHY VAHEY (133RD): Hello, Donna. ["Hi, thank you" in background] It's great to have you here again and to see you. So, two questions, one is related to the frivolous assessment -- the issues with the tax. So, can you just give me a sense of how many communities are facing this and what the magnitude of that issue is for you?

DONNA HAMZY-CARROCIA: Sure, I'd be happy to. So, as I mentioned, there was an article that I cited in my testimony this year and last year that was published in 2014. And in that article, Chris Hoffman from the Connecticut Magazine did say that it was his understanding that Connecticut municipalities are, and I’m quoting, "are hemorrhaging at least $20 million dollars of tax revenue a year in these unjustified tax appeals." I do not know how many communities are dealing with this, but I do know that this is a common issue amongst the majority of municipalities in the state.

REP. MCCARTHY VAHEY (133RD): Thank you for that. ["Sure" in background] And then, with respect to 7318 and the Uniform Relocation Assistance Act, if we were to have a conversation, whether it's a task force, a study, or just bringing folks together, who -- who do you think should be sitting at the table participating in that conversation?

DONNA HAMZY-CARROCIA: Sure, thank you, that's a good question. So, we would love to be a part of that conversation, as we represent a majority of the
towns and cities in the state of Connecticut and would be happy to also invite some of those members to the table with us. But, I do agree with your previous comments for the earlier speaker that, you know, we should invite the housing advocates and the landlords and so that all stakeholders could be at the table just so that we can come to some agreement. I think 'cause we're all -- you know, I think we all have a mutually same goal, just getting there is, I think, what should -- should be part of that process.

REP. MCCARTHY VAHEY (133RD): Thank you, and as I had mentioned earlier, I look forward to continuing that conversation and being a part of that as well, ["Thank you" in background] helping to reach some resolution. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

SENATOR CASSANO (4TH): Thank you, Madam Chair. Donna, a quick question. The interest in landlords -- is there a statewide association of landlords or any of those? Because I've served on a lot of these task forces, we all have, and usually you're representin' a statewide entity and so on. ["Sure" in background] So, if I don't have that, how do I find a landlord? You know, do I get one from New Haven and Hartford, or Bridgeport and so on, a small town and large town? Is there any kind associating that the people should be there -- tenant associations, landlord associations? Do you have any idea on that?

DONNA HAMZY-CARROCIA: So, my understanding is there is a landlord association, so -- and I do believe that there are advocates who represent the tenants, you know, especially in this building. So, I would
say yeah, I believe that there -- there are organizations like that that exist, Senator.

SENATOR CASSANO (4TH): I think the most important part of this process is the selection of the committee.

DONNA HAMZY-CARROCIA: I agree.

SENATOR CASSANO (4TH): 'Cause I've been on so many of these statewide, some were effective, some were not because there weren't the right people. And I think it's really important to follow up on that.

DONNA HAMZY-CARROCIA: Thank you for those comments. I agree.


DONNA HAMZY-CARROCIA: Thank you. Have a good day.

SENATOR CASSANO (4TH): You too.

REP. HENNESSY (127TH): Thank you. It's an honor to be here, Chairman Cassano, McVahey [mispronounced] -- McCarthy Vahey, Vice-Chairs, Ranking Members, and distinguished members of the Planning and Development Committee. I used to be a member of this committee when I was freshman a number of years, and it was a delight. [Crosstalk] -- I do, I do. I served with you, that's right, and Jonathan over there. It was great, and I just wanna say I really appreciate the opportunity to speak on House Bill 6566, AN ACT PROHIBITING MUNICIPAL EMPLOYEES...
FROM SERVING ON CERTAIN MUNICIPAL LEGISLATIVE BODIES.

This bill has been -- we've tried this, this is I think the third time. The Bridgeport delegation has been trying this. Some of my testimony: The motivation to run for public office, for me, began with the frustration that the city of Bridgeport ignored its own city charter and allowed city employees to serve on the city council. Back then, half the city council worked for the city. I saw this as a conflict of interest, and I wanted to address this issue. So, I started running for office. I saw this as a conflict of interest that had a corrosive effect on how the city operated, and I didn't think the people of Bridgeport's interests were being fairly represented. I'm happy to say that this is no longer the case. Today, there are no city employees serving on the Bridgeport City Council. This is due, in part, to this bill that I have tried to pass in the past. Although I wasn't able to pass this bill, it did create greater awareness of this issue and, I believe, had the positive effect of electing city council members unencumbered with this employment conflict. But, this doesn't mean that we can't go backwards to the previous ways. That is why I, and the entire Bridgeport delegation, seek to once again get this bill passed.

It's an interesting fact that at all levels of government this conflict of interest is against the law. We have, at the federal level, the Hatch Act. The Hatch Act was passed in 1883 as a federal law prohibiting government employees from active participation in partisan politics. While the Hatch
Act does not apply to state government, the state of Connecticut does not allow state employees of the executive branch to serve in the legislative branch.

It's interesting that this city -- so, we have a city charter, and in that charter, it specifically says that if you're an employee, you can't serve on the legislative body. But, due to a loophole in state statute, this -- this charter is not empowered. So, what this bill would do would simply to add the clause -- or any body exercising the powers of a board of finance. That would include municipalities that don't have boards of finance, but their city councils act as boards of finance.

This bill is in conflict with -- well, I just wanna say that those that are against this bill, I think, have a valid concern, and that is it's really difficult to get people to run for local government. There's just not enough people to fill these positions, and their argument is that this, if it were to pass, would be a detriment for people that work for the city. So, I understand their concerns, but at the end of the day, this is the right thing to do, and I hope that you can support this. Thank you.

SENATOR CASSANO (4TH): Thank you, Representative Hennessy, and I have supported this bill, as you know, for several years. ["Yes" in background] Just a comment placed.

Representative Baker and then Representative Arnone. ["He was first" in background] Oh, okay.
REP. BAKER (124TH): Thank you, Mr. Chair. Thank you for coming out here and sharing information, Representative Hennessy. So, a couple quick questions, okay. So, what is the actual -- is there a state statute that prohibits members of the local municipalities to show -- to sit on boards and commissions?

REP. HENNESSY (127TH): The existing language does not include legislative bodies voting on their budgets. I guess, at one time, there were boards of finance that were completely separate. Like I know in Fairfield they have a board of finance. They hash out the minutia of the budget, and -- and then it's voted on -- on the whole thing by your legislative body. And Bridgeport had that also up until many years ago in which they collapsed the board of finance into a legislative body. When they did that, it opened up to this conflict of interest. So, this bill would include legislative bodies that act as board of finance.

REP. BAKER (124TH): So, have you seen instances where people have been on city council or board of eds that were part of the -- that were part of the legislative body but that were employed with voting on budgets or their own salaries or --?

REP. HENNESSY (127TH): First of all, let me clarify that this does not pertain to the board of ed. ["Okay" in background] The board of ed has its own separate statute that this would not touch. People -- boards of ed can pretty much do whatever they want. But, yes, that was -- like I said, that's the motive. That's the reason why I decided to start running for office because there were these
conflicts of interest in Bridgeport at that time, not anymore right now.

REP. BAKER (124TH): Okay. So, you said that in the past there were a number of employees that were sitting on the city council, and you said that is not the case at this particular time. Was that because people just didn't vote for them because of that possible conflict, or was it because that there was so much pressure and people just didn't wanna run period?

REP. HENNESSY (127TH): Well, it's totally anecdotal obviously as to why we no longer have city employees serving on the city council. But I would say that, at the time when this first bill came out, it was -- it was statewide news for quite a while, everybody interested in it, and at the time it was also said, well this is a Bridgeport problem. And, you know, it's not a Bridgeport problem now, but I think that, you know, as a state, we can, you know, improve the -- the atmosphere if we were to pass this. I don't know if that answers your question though.

REP. BAKER (124TH): Yes, it does. So, you know, as we move forward, you said that aren't people that are actually sitting on the city council and stuff. What is your main particular reason to wanna continue to move forward? What do you -- you wanna just kinda put something in place so there are no more loopholes, so that in the future there can be more transparency and more -- is that your reason why?

REP. HENNESSY (127TH): Yes, thank you for that question, Representative Baker. Absolutely, that
this would improve how the business is done, and it would also just improve the optics. When you have people -- you know, a lot of times they say, well I recuse myself when it's on the budget. But, I've seen that that doesn't necessarily happen all the time, and you know, if this bill were to pass, then they wouldn't have to recuse them because there would be no conflict.

REP. BAKER (124TH): Well, thank you for comin' out here and sharing that information. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

SENATOR CASSANO (4TH): Representative Arnone.

REP. ARNONE (58TH): [Background coughing] Thank you, Mr. Chair. So, on the conflict of interest thing, and this is where I kind of get a little uncomfortable with this kind of legislation 'cause it deals with a class of people in what they actually do for a living, and these are elected -- you're talking, with Bridgeport, they're elected -- people that are elected into office. And, you know, and I really, truly feel that, you know, the voter is the person that should be deciding who is in and out of office. But, as for the conflict of interest, and you mentioned recusing -- and we have very strict ethic laws that are on us as legislators, and we may have to, at times, recuse ourselves for personal differences. What is the difference in -- between somebody with a conflict that may be a job conflict, or a person with a conflict that may be what he does for a living also -- a builder or, you know, any other job that may have a conflict during a legislative process? What's the difference between that, and why is it
any different for me to recuse for something or somebody that's a municipal employee that's gonna recuse for a decision?

REP. HENNESSY (127TH): Well, I'm really not gonna be able to answer that [laughing] succinctly. You point out that, you know, we up here, we all have jobs. We all have to make a living. So, it's extremely difficult, and especially at the local level. I mean, you put in long hours, and you have to be educated to very complex minutia. It's extremely difficult to find people willing to do that. So, you know, I am completely, like I said, sympathetic to the argument against this, but the fact of the matter is, if you do it at the state level and the federal level, we should be doing it at the local level. That's kind of where I stand. And I anecdotally perceived that there was a detrimental, corrosive effect in Bridgeport at the time. For years, I believed that the city council was not interested in serving the people but just was a rubber stamp for the administration and not -- not doing their job. And that's what motivated me to run. And, like I said, I do not see that happening these days. I think we have a great city council that does do a lot of pushback and does their job.

REP. ARNONE (58TH): Thank you, and we wrestled with even like land-use boards too. You have builders, realtors on land-use boards, and a lot of people are very uncomfortable with that because it's very close to what the board has to decide every day. And again, this is where I get -- I get -- I feel a little nervous in legislating things that are a voter responsibility and/or an ethics responsibility
in some of these things. But, I thank you for your testimony and appreciate it, with all due respect.

REP. HENNESSY (127TH): Thank you.

SENATOR CASSANO (4TH): Thank you, Representative. Representative Vahey -- McCarthy Vahey.

REP. MCCARTHY VAHEY (133RD): Thank you, Mr. Chair, and Representative Hennessy, I'd like to thank you for being here today. And I just would like to offer my condolences to you and to all of the members of the Bridgeport delegation today. I know this is an extremely difficult day for all of you, so I appreciate you being before us.

The one question, just to confirm, that I had for you -- you used the Fairfield example. We have a board of selectmen, a board of finance, and an RTM. With this legislation, someone would be able to serve on the RTM but would be unable to serve on the board of finance. Am I correct in that?

REP. HENNESSY (127TH): Yes. Well, this bill does not speak to boards of finance because it's already in statute that boards of finance are not allowed to be city employees. This just expands that to legislative bodies that act as a board of finance. And thank you for that question.

REP. MCCARTHY VAHEY (133RD): Thank you, Representative. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

SENATOR CASSANO (4TH): Are there other questions? All right. ["Stafstrom" in background] Go ahead, Senator.
SENATOR CHAMPAGNE (35TH): Thank you for coming in today, Representative. I think I have the same concerns as Representative Arnone because in the town where I started as a town councilman, I actually worked for the town as well. And I did not vote on anything that had to do with my job or would benefit me in any way, and the voters were the ones that voted me in every year. If a conflict arose, I always took the step of excusing myself. In fact, I would walk away from the table for certain things, and I've seen other town employees do the same thing. And, if not, then it would be an ethics violation. But I believe in leaving it up to the voters as well. Because, if I look at the legislature here in Hartford, I see a lot of conflicts of interest throughout. You know what I'm talkin' about, and I'm not gonna point any out. There are just huge conflicts of interests. And if we're gonna do this to the municipalities, then why aren't we doing it on the state level. I truly believe that we shouldn't be dictating how the towns run. It's the voters who should be doing that.

And I agree with what you said that, you know, when you came in, if the whole city council -- I could see a problem with that, but we haven't had that situation. Do you feel that if a town has workers on there, and they do abide by the ethics rules, they excuse themselves from anything to do with their job or anything that would benefit them, do you feel that's okay?

REP. HENNESSY (127TH): Well, I totally empathize with -- with what you say and, you know, commend you for your ethical standards. I'm just saying that
there -- there's a potential for not someone to have that high level of standard and that, you know, my position is that this is a loophole that's old language that needs to be updated to include legislative bodies because obviously it wasn't a question whenever this thing was written.

SENATOR CHAMPAGNE (35TH): Right. But if we have a situation where some employees are required to live in the town that they work in, and if that person wants to go into politics, you're now limiting them. You're saying, you can't go into politics, and I think that's wrong.

REP. HENNESSY (127TH): Well, I'm acknowledging that this is a difficult bill for this body to consider, and I'm just thankful that you are considering it.

SENATOR CHAMPAGNE (35TH): Thank you.

REP. STAFSTROM (129TH): Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and Representative Hennessy, thank for not just being here today on what's obviously a difficult day, and for bringing this bill before this body again this year, but for your tireless advocacy on this bill year-in and year-out for longer than I've been in this building. I remember running for office to come up here and being asked about this bill and promising that I would support it as part of a debate to get up here, and I want you to know how much I appreciate your leadership on this. But I just -- I wanna just clarify a couple things that I think -- I know the language in the past has included in this bill, and I believe it does this year.
So, this bill doesn't apply to every municipality in the state of Connecticut, correct?

REP. HENNESSY (127TH): Correct. It applies to only municipalities whose legislative bodies serve also as boards of finance.

REP. STAFSTROM (129TH): And that's only -- that's only a handful of municipalities in the state of Connecticut, correct?
REP. HENNESSY (127TH): The last time I ran this bill, a few years ago, OLR said there was 22.

REP. STAFSTROM (129TH): Okay, and even of those 22, some of those 22 already have it in their charter that municipal employees are not allowed to serve on that combined legislative and finance body, correct?

REP. HENNESSY (127TH): That's correct.

REP. STAFSTROM (129TH): Okay.

REP. HENNESSY (127TH): And, like I said, it remains silent because it's not empowered through state language.

REP. STAFSTROM (129TH): Right. And there's only -- so, I think there's only -- will you agree with me that there's only a couple municipalities in the state that this bill would actually apply to 'cause it's only those towns that have the combined legislative and finance authority and also don't already have it in their charter that the municipal employee cannot serve on that legislative body?
REP. HENNESSY (127TH): So, that's why you're Chair of Judic and a good lawyer. [Laughing] Yeah, just to -- what he's talking about -- the Charter of the City of Bridgeport, Chapter 5, on the city council, G-1, "No member of the city council shall, during the time in which he/she serves as a member of that city council, be appointed to or hold any office, the emoluments of which are to be paid by the city treasury." So, that language means that.

REP. STAFSTROM (129TH): Right, right. So, folks who may be worried about this bill affecting their town, for most of the folks in this building, it's not gonna affect their town.

REP. HENNESSY (127TH): That's absolutely correct.

REP. STAFSTROM (129TH): Okay. And you had mentioned -- I think you used the word loophole -- because we currently have it in statute that a town that has a finance board, a city employee or a town employee in those towns can't serve on a finance board, correct?

REP. HENNESSY (127TH): That's correct.

REP. STAFSTROM (129TH): And there's a lot more towns in the state of Connecticut that that prohibition applies to than this bill would apply to.

REP. HENNESSY (127TH): That's correct.

REP. STAFSTROM (129TH): Okay. Thank you.

SENATOR CASSANO (4TH): I can tell you that it's known as the Bridgeport Bill in the committee for
these several years now. I believe, if I'm correct, that there was a point in time that there was almost enough people on the council that if they all recused themselves you wouldn't have enough votes to pass legislation. So, it was a real concern when Representative Hennessy brought this bill forward. So, in spite of what their charter has said or what the legislation was, that was a situation particularly for some of the positions that existed at the time. So, I do remember that well. So-- Senator?

SENATOR CHAMPAGNE (35TH): Do I understand it right that they fixed this in Bridgeport so that this can no longer happen?

REP. HENNESSY (127TH): Oh, no. I believe that what that fixed was the perception of conflict of interest due to running this bill up here had a positive effect to basically move this -- these people in offense to the city charter out, but as long as -- you know, the way it works is that a municipality can't empower a statute unless -- unless it's covered by state statute. And so, since it's not, we could have this charter, but it's not empowered. So, a municipality can say, okay we don't have to do it according to state statute, but we are going to do that. We are going to ensure that no city employee can serve on a city council.

But unfortunately, in Bridgeport, it wasn't done. It was completely ignored, and it was because they could because this loophole existed. So, this is just a clause that closes a loophole that --
SENATOR CHAMPAGNE (35TH): Is there an avenue for the citizens of Bridgeport to step up and close that loophole without the legislators?

REP. HENNESSY (127TH): No, the way -- the way the Constitution of Connecticut is run, all power is derived from the state.

SENATOR CHAMPAGNE (35TH): What I mean from that is, I know the charter in at least one of my towns, if you get enough signatures, you can open the charter to change something. Can they do that in Bridgeport with signatures?

REP. HENNESSY (127TH): Well, the city charter is already clear on this position. It's at the state level that the problem is.

SENATOR CHAMPAGNE (35TH): Okay. All right, well I know it does affect at least one of my towns. Thank you.

SENATOR CASSANO (4TH): All right, Seeing no other questions. Representative, thank you very much, and I applaud you for your persistence.

REP. HENNESSY (127TH): Thank you, Senator Cassano. Thank you.

SENATOR CASSANO (4TH): Cecile Thomas. Is it Cecil? I'm sorry -- Cecil. All right. Representative Lavielle is on deck. No, I'm sorry, hold on. [Crosstalk] Yeah, Derry Gorski is on deck, then Lavielle, if she's here. Cecil, welcome.
CECIL THOMAS: Chairpersons McCarthy Vahey and Cassano and esteemed members of the Planning and Development Committee. I am one of those worried housing advocates referenced by Mr. Sharkey earlier in his comments regarding House Bill 7318, AN ACT CONCERNING REVISIONS TO THE UNIFORM RELOCATION ASSISTANCE ACT.

The Relocation Assistance Act, as mentioned in earlier comments, has been in effect since 1971. It has been clarified at various points by courts dealing with the issue -- in 1984 by the Connecticut Supreme Court in Dukes versus Durante, and I have spent the better part of the last five years litigating Serrano versus Gaitor, a class action involving the city of Hartford dealing with their noncompliance with the Uniform Relocation Assistance Act from about January of 2010 through September of 2015.

What I would say is due to those various decisions of the courts as well as the decisions of the Department of Housing and the DECD before it, a lot of clarification has been issued by the administrative agency tasked with interpreting the statute as well as the courts. Fundamentally, the URRA provides five benefits. Two of those are the two payments that I referenced in my written testimony. One is a payment for moving expenses, which is usually done by a schedule of payments ranging from about $250 dollars to $500 dollars. The second is a payment that allows for the tenant to, when displaced, secure permanent replacement housing that is decent, safe, and sanitary that is designed to cover both the security deposit and the rent differential. So, if the condemned apartment
was at one -- at one rate, and the new rent is slightly higher, you take the difference, you multiply it by 48. It's capped at $4,000 dollars.

In addition to that, the case laws interpreted the requirement to provide temporary housing as well as advisory assistance and storage in some cases. And the advisory assistance is largely information on the availability of replacement housing.

What I would say is that those benefits are clear. They're definite and they're distinct, and they are provided at a time when the displaced person and their family is literally at one of the most unsettling and difficult, traumatic times in their lives. Many of the tenants, and I have literally worked with hundreds of displaced tenants over the last several years, are really, you know, dealing with horrible housing conditions in their apartments, and those housing conditions have accumulated to the point over a course of years and months where, when the city does finally intervene, that individual has dealt with some horrendous conditions for quite some time. To add on to that, the uncertainty that comes with 30 days in a motel, it's simply untenable for most of our clients. And I'm not just talking about low-income individuals. Because what we've just seen from the federal government shutdown, for example, is most Americans are living paycheck to paycheck.

So, if you talk about the accumulated financial harms, that includes, you know, if you've paid the rent and you've been displaced after the first of the month, you lose out on that rent. You lose your security deposit. You might lose personal property
because what usually happens after these displacements is theft and looting in a lot of our major municipal areas. If the landlord is in there while you're in this temporary displacement, your property is usually left behind in the condemned apartment, further subject to damage and loss. And so, then you deal with lost wages, everything else that comes with that, and our remedy has been the same thing since 1971 -- $4,500 dollar. It has not changed since that July 6, 1971, date.

So, essentially, we think the act works the way it should. It's been clarified, and it -- what it is designed to do is to really ensure that displaced persons are treated fairly and equitably at one of the hardest times of their lives. So, happy to take any questions you may have.

SENATOR CASSANO (4TH): Any questions? Appreciate your testimony. It helps clarify.

CECIL THOMAS: Thank you very much.


DERRYLYN GORSKI: Good afternoon, Mr. Chairman, members of the committee. My name is Derrylyn Gorski. I'm the First Selectman for the town of Bethany, and I'm also a member of the COST Board of Directors, and I'm here to speak in opposition to House Bill 7319, AN ACT CONCERNING THE FISCAL INDEPENDENCE OF SCHOOL DISTRICTS. And, just as a note, the COST Board of Directors was polled on this -- on this bill, and it was overwhelmingly in
opposition to it. And again, we are the Council of Small Towns.

Bethany is a small town of about 5,500 people. We're the only rural town in New Haven County. We are part of the Amity Region 5 School District for grades 7 through 12. We're in that district with Woodbridge and Orange, but we have our own board of ed for our community school, which is pre-K through 6. The town of Bethany, on the municipal side of the budget and the board of education side of the budget, we already work together. We are in the same group for our medical benefits. The town plows the parking lot and mows the fields. We buy the heating oil and diesel and that in a consortium with the other towns in the school district. The BSC Superintendent meets with the Chair of the Board of Finance and with me in advance of the budget season, so that we can kind of talk about what's coming up on both sides of the budget so that we know where we're going before the whole process starts.

So, you know, I share the concerns of those that are opposed to the bill with -- to give the board of ed a new school district -- the taxing authority, but it's also the bonding, the fact that they would be able to go out for bonds. And just practically speaking, we're going out for a road bond, as most towns are having to do with the horrible weather that we've had the last several years, and we were planning on that last year. We're implementing it this year, and we're folding in to that road bond the plowing -- I'm sorry, the paving and drainage work that needs to be done up at the school for their parking lot and their basketball courts, and that's all gonna get -- be rolled into the road
bond. So, if this were the case, would we be able to do that, or would the board of ed have to have their own bond to do that type of work?

So, there's some, you know, practical things that just don't make a lot of sense to a small town. We -- we have to work together. You know, we're small. Everybody knows everybody, and you can't get away with much. The parents come to the board of finance meetings. The board of ed budget is presented at that meeting, again at the annual budget hearing. And when we send out our call, our budgets are passed most frequently at a town meeting, the -- although it's true that it says -- one line item in the town budget says board of education -- the itemization of that budget is also included in that for information for people, so they'll know what they're voting for. So, this system works for us. I don't understand, you know, why we would wanna change something that seems to work very well, especially for the small towns. Have any questions?

SENATOR CASSANO (4TH): Questions? Representative Delnicki.

REP. DELNICKI (14TH): I'll yield mine.

REP. ZAWISTOWSKI (61ST): Thank you, and thank you, Mr. Chairman. Thank you for coming here today. You mentioned Amity School District. How many towns does that incorporate?

DERRYLYN GORSKI: Three. It's three towns: Bethany, Orange, and Woodbridge.
REP. ZAWISTOWSKI (61ST): Okay, and you mentioned that Bethany has its own board of ed. Is there a separate board of ed that covers the regional.

DERRYLYN GORSKI: Yes, the other -- the other two towns have their own board of ed, and Bethany has two members on the Amity Regional District Board of Ed.

REP. ZAWISTOWSKI (61ST): Is it done by population?

DERRYLYN GORSKI: Yes.

REP. ZAWISTOWSKI (61ST): Or by school population or overall population?

DERRYLYN GORSKI: By school population.

REP. ZAWISTOWSKI (61ST): By school population. How does that work budget-wise? Is it -- is it working or not working?

DERRYLYN GORSKI: It's sorta -- well, it's great now. About five years ago, our budget went up about half-a-million dollars because of enrollment -- the Bethany side of the budget. The overall budget didn't go up that much. This year, our enrollment's down, and Orange is pickin' up the bill. So, it kinda -- it works. Whatever the enrollment is in October of the previous year, that's -- that's what you -- that's how it's apportioned.

REP. ZAWISTOWSKI (61ST): Okay, so you -- you have an arrangement that currently works really well for you.
DERRYLYN GORSKI: Right. I mean, again, they're not their own taxing authority. And I've been in here in opposition to allowing them to keep that one percent of their budget surplus because we wanna see them having to go to a referendum if they want some capital items, so that the voters can decide, not a nine-member board. But, it's a different issue, but kinda related.

REP. ZAWISTOWSKI (61ST): Thank you. I'm gonna ask you the same question I've asked a few other people as well. What do you consider to be the major -- the biggest problem that you have with this bill?

DERRYLYN GORSKI: Well, I think again it breaks down the relationship. We have a cooperative relationship now. We feel like we're together. And we do look for other ways to share services, and you know, the state is trying to get towns and boards of ed to do more of that. This, I see, just creates two silos in a small town that it's unnecessary to do.

REP. ZAWISTOWSKI (61ST): Okay. Thank you very much, and thank you, Mr. Chairman.

SENATOR CASSANO (4TH): Representative Delnicki.

REP. DELNICKI (14TH): Thank you, Mr. Chair, and thank you for coming forward with your testimony. I'm gonna ask a very simple question. If this were to go forward, do you think it would increase the cost of the town's total budget between the board of ed and the town services, keep it about the same, or lower it?
DERRYLYN GORSKI: I would think that it would increase it simply because the board of ed would have to hire their own -- we don’t have a lot of help, you know. My superintendent, the BCS Superintendent is also the business manager. She doesn't have a finance director, neither do I. We just hired a finance manager. So, it would necessitate having a more professional person advising the board of ed. So, yes, there'd be a high-cost job that would have to happen.

REP. DELNICKI (14TH): All right. I appreciate your testimony and the fact that you believe it would actually cause your costs to go up.

DERRYLYN GORSKI: Um-hm, I do.

REP. DELNICKI (14TH): Thank you. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

SENATOR CASSANO (4TH): Other questions?

DERRYLYN GORSKI: Okay, thank you.

SENATOR CASSANO (4TH): Thank you very much.

BETSY GARA: I was going to tell you, that's okay, I'm fine. I did just want to join my COST Board Members that came up here to testify today. My name is Betsy Gara. I'm the Executive Director of the Connecticut Council of Small Towns, and as you've heard, we have significant concerns with House Bill 7319, how it would impact government structures, debt costs, spending levels -- you name it, you've heard it. So again, we do oppose that bill.
I also wanna just thank you for introducing the bill on legal notices. This has become kind of a perennial issue, so I still hold out hope that this will happen someday, where towns can avoid the costs associated with publishing legal notices in the newspapers and then move to publishing them on the website. For small towns, a lot of them are losing their local papers, which is very unfortunate, but it means that they have to publish in the more expensive metropolitan newspapers. And I think fewer and fewer people are looking at the newspapers for those ads, and so if we can put them on the website, it might actually enhance their ability to find out what's happening with that.

And there are other bills we have submitted testimony on, as usual. So, if you have any questions, please let me know. Thank you.


REP. CARNEY (23RD): Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. Hi, Betsy. Thanks for testifying. I just have one question for you. The First Selectwoman of Bethany had mentioned that a -- you polled some of your members. Did any members say that they supported this bill, and if so, why?

BETSY GARA: There was one member who actually had lived in Michigan his -- most of his life and who was familiar with it from that perspective. However, he also agreed that he would join with COST in agreeing that the board should oppose the bill. And I understand that -- people that have experienced that in other states may be familiar
with it, but in Connecticut we have very different governing structures. I'm in a regional school district. Our board members are voted on a staggered basis. They're not voted on at the ballot. They're voted at town meeting, and they're not voted on in November. So, if this measure was to create an opportunity for greater accountability for education spending, it really misses the mark because I don't think those people would be held accountable for increasing costs. I think it would be the local elected officials, the first selectmen and town council and board of selectmen that would end up facing that accountability even though they had nothing to do with it. What we've always said is we need more control over local education spending and that we need to continue to work with our boards of education in our neighboring town to promote shared services and regional cooperation. Thank you.

REP. CARNEY (23RD): Thanks Betsy.

SENATOR CASSANO (4TH): Other questions or comments? [Background talking] You're still here?

REP. ARNONE (58TH): Yeah. I came back in.

SENATOR CASSANO (4TH): Oh, you're here. [Laughing]

REP. ARNONE (58TH): Yeah, I’m here now. On the publication of legal notices, shortened legal notices, I believe, this -- right, just to clarify --

BETSY GARA: It is -- the bill does speak to shortened legal notices, and I do have a concern
with that because I actually had a legal intern one year go through all the legal notices required in the statute, which there are many, and most of them already provide for an abbreviated posting in the newspaper with a longer version available in the library and at town hall and on the website. So, I don't know that that necessarily gets to the issue. What I've always said is what we should do is allow it like they have with the Department of Energy and Environmental Protection, allow certain notices to be posted on the website and determine whether or not that is -- is helping towns, whether the public is finding the information appropriately, kind of piloting to see how that works. And it has worked for other state agencies that have allowed legal notices to post on their website, so I'm not sure why it wouldn't work for local communities.

REP. ARNONE (58TH): Thank you.

SENATOR CASSANO (4TH): Representative McCarthy Vahey.

REP. MCCARTHY VAHEY (133RD): Thank you, Mr. Chair, and thank you, Ms. Gara, for being here with us again. My apologies that I missed most of your testimony, but I did wanna ask you -- I'm not sure if you mentioned anything about the Uniform Relocation Assistance Act, and I, whether you did or didn't, wondered if you would weigh in?

BETSY GARA: I did not have an opportunity to review that. We've been kind of inundated this week with bills in finance, bills in here. So, I will take a look at it, and if I have any concerns -- but I would defer to CCM on that particular issue.
REP. MCCARTHY VAHEY (133RD): Thank you for that. If you do have input, as you have the chance, I would love to hear it from you. Thank you so much for being here with us.

BETSY GARA: Great. Thank you.

SENATOR CASSANO (4TH): Betsy, one question, wait. [Laughing] I'm not gonna let you away that quick. You know, it's routine for us to come into this building, and I did it before I was here as mayors, as first selectman, COST, CCM, but we're missin' the boat with one part of government. And I say that because I was reading the Journal Inquirer and a local fire district published its budget -- three full pages they paid for to publish that budget -- and I said, wow, now we know that at "the government level," the first selectmen, the councils, and so on, but when we get into the districts, which are also taxpayers' funds in a lot of cases or fire district funds, whatever it might be, our messaging apparently isn't as effective if we've got a fire department that's taking three full pages out. And that's where the abbreviated advertising really could make a big, big difference. Is it fire districts -- sure, we need to know what it costs, but we don't need to know how many spare tires or this or that or whatever it might be. So, how do we get to that level?

BETSY GARA: Well, I agree. Those are the types of legal notices that we should say you can provide a summary in the newspaper and then direct them where they can get additional information. And I think that would be a perfect example. So, rather than do
a blanket legal notices bill that never passes, maybe you should focus on that and look at the statute that requires fire districts to post their budget. Maybe they're doing it for some other reason, but if that statute requires them to post the full budget, that would be a perfect place to start with allowing them to print a summary.

SENATOR CASSANO (4TH): Thank you. Excuse me, at 3:15, we have to adjourn our morning meeting, so -- but you'll be through before then, I'm sure. [Crosstalk]

REP. LAVIELLE (143RD): We'll see.

SENATOR CASSANO (4TH): If not, I have to interrupt, just to close the meeting.

REP. LAVIELLE (143RD): (There, I thought it was on.) Thank you. Good afternoon, Senator Cassano, Representative McCarthy Vahey, Senator Champagne, and Representative Zawistowski, and members. I am here to testify today on House Bill 7319, and as you know, you've heard a lot about it already today, it gives powers of taxing, borrowing, and appropriations to school districts, and it takes them away from municipalities when they have to do with education.

I know you've heard a great deal. You've heard a lot of the standard arguments. So, I will run through very quickly. You have my written testimony. This raises a lot of questions for me the way the bill is written -- some of them have to do with who has oversight of the rate-setting process outside of the board of ed of the district.
What would happen to the ECS formula, which is currently based on criteria provided by towns and the funds are given to towns to distribute? Bonding decisions -- how would they be made? Would there be referenda? If so, who would organize them? Are the school -- do the school taxing districts, would -- I'd imagine if they were to bond would have their own bond ratings. How are those established? What criteria would the rating agencies use, and would the taxing districts be able to borrow as cheaply as the towns do currently? And finally, since the school district would have to be administering all this -- the taxing, borrowing, and appropriating -- would a whole layer of people have to be hired to deal with those tasks? And how much would that cost, and who would deal with it?

So, aside from those questions, I oppose the bill for several reasons. One is that in Connecticut -- you've heard from people this morning -- I wasn't able to listen, but I watched because I was in another meeting, so I had -- I had it on the screen -- and I know there are people from other states who testified and who felt comfortable with this. To that I would say that in Connecticut, our various forms of town government have traditionally fostered a distinctive intimate relationship between residents and the finances of their school districts. They have a direct way of providing input. This has heightened the focus of our communities on the quality of education and has also attracted many residents from other states and other -- other towns sometimes. While independent taxing districts exist in other states, in Connecticut this legislation would greatly diminish the role that residents now play and greatly appreciate in
oversight, determination, and allocation of the funding of their school districts. [Ringing]

Also, because this separation of powers would stop municipal governments from performing their current functions of oversight on behalf of the school district, this legislation would require the creation of new layers of administration that would probably increase local property taxes and raise costs at a time when all of the budgets in our state at all levels are very fragile. The focus of boards of education is -- I think we all agree it should be on ensuring that students have the best opportunities to learn. Right now, boards of finance and other municipal government entities are responsible for the financial health of their communities, and they deal with providing fiscal oversight, not only of their towns but of their school districts, and assessing how much revenue the residents are able and willing to pay every year. So, they act as stewards of taxpayer funds overall. That provides a system of checks and balances. Also, this bill would, because of that, require boards of ed to dilute their focus on teaching and learning.

Student outcomes should always be our primary concern when you're talking about matters related to education. There's no mention in the bill of any potential favorable impact on the quality of education, nor is there a mention of any problem it's intended to solve. Their seems to be no reason for this legislation. So, I respectfully urge the committee to reject it. Thank you.
SENATOR CASSANO (4TH): Thank you for your testimony. Are there questions? Representative Zawistowski.

REP. ZAWISTOWSKI (61ST): Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and thank you for coming here today. I know that you were kind of watching carefully to see what time you had to get down here and everything else. It's been a challenging day for a lot of us. Which towns do you represent?

REP. LAVIELLE (143RD): I represent Wilton, Norwalk, and Westport.

REP. ZAWISTOWSKI (61ST): And are these three different school districts?

REP. LAVIELLE (143RD): Oh, very much so yes.

REP. ZAWISTOWSKI (61ST): Oh, I didn't mean -- [laughing] I didn’t mean different in quite that way, ["No, no, but they are" in background] but these are separate school districts?

REP. LAVIELLE (143RD): One is very large, one is sort of large, and one is small.

REP. ZAWISTOWSKI (61ST): Okay, and things seem to be working okay the way that they are currently?

REP. LAVIELLE (143RD): They do actually, and there is a lot of citizen participation. There is -- the towns all have, to my recollection, a triple A rating. The -- Norwalk has recently obtained funds from the state in partial reimbursement for a whole new school facilities plan. The -- There's a town
meeting form of government in Wilton, an RTM, non-partisan RTM in Westport, and a common council in Norwalk, and they all deal with this differently, but they are -- it is a system that is functioning in each case.

REP. ZAWISTOWSKI (61ST): Actually, you brought up something that just made me think of something that hasn't been brought up yet is how this would deal with Alliance Districts too. It's just one of those -- I've got a long list of issues that I think this bill creates. What would you consider to be the primary issue on your part?

SENATOR CASSANO (4TH): Can I interrupt for one second. I would like to take a minute and recess this meeting. All those in favor of a quick recess? [Crosstalk] Okay, we are in recess. [Background talking] This public hearing, right. All right, the public hearing is in recess.

RECESS

SENATOR CASSANO (4TH): We are back on. Thank you.

REP. LAVIELLE (143RD): I had to restrain myself from voting.

REP. ZAWISTOWSKI (61ST): Thank you. We probably should've given you a warning about that.

REP. LAVIELLE (143RD): Senator Cassano did.

REP. ZAWISTOWSKI (61ST): Oh, he did. Okay. Good. Thank you. To get back to the question, what do you
consider probably from -- your personal major issue with this legislation?

REP. LAVIELLE (143RD): Well, there are so many.

REP. ZAWISTOWSKI (61ST): Just your first choice.

REP. LAVIELLE (143RD): Yes, I already gave many of them to you. I'll tell you something that I find very disconcerting. This session, we've seen a number of pieces of legislation, whether it be in terms of zoning, or what kind of turf people can have at their schools, taxes, car taxes, payments by towns for teachers pensions, regionalization, and this. There seems to be a tendency to interfere with the way that things are managed at the local town level or local school level that are not broken, when I believe that we should be focusing on problems at the state level that affect the condition of our finances and our economy. And to push this off on the towns as though there were a problem at that level that was causing this is -- is very disconcerting, and that was probably what drew me to look at this in the first place -- but all the other problems I mentioned are certainly issues as well.

REP. ZAWISTOWSKI (61ST): Thank you, and I do have a running list from the testimony today. Thank you very much, and thank you, Mr. Chairman.

SENATOR CASSANO (4TH): Representative Delnicki.

REP. DELNICKI (14TH): Thank you, Mr. Chair, and thank you for coming forward and testifying on this issue here. So, I was listening to your commentary
there. Do you see this as conceivably breaking something that has worked relatively well in our state of Connecticut and that's how cities and towns have dealt with their school board budget and their town budgets?

REP. LAVIELLE (143RD): I do, particularly in terms of what I referred to as the intimate relationship between residents and the finances of their schools. I know that there were some concerns voiced earlier about transparency. If there are some school districts that are currently not showing their full budget, or towns that are not presenting two budget lines, that's easily solved through a bifurcation of billing -- very easily solved. The ability of an entire town to be able to vote on a bond issue for a school district is very important. People feel they have a stake in that, and they want the stake in that because the school is a very, very important part of the character of their child, and it's visceral. It's something people feel very deeply. And, I think, in any way, even if it's just administratively, divorcing the school district from the town would be a big blow, I really do.

REP. DELNICKI (14TH): One final question, and I've been asking everybody this. Do you see this either saving towns money, costing them money, or basically staying where they are.

REP. LAVIELLE (143RD): I absolutely -- well, it wouldn't cost the town itself money because --

REP. DELNICKI (14TH): The taxpayers.
REP. LAVIELLE (143RD): -- the town can no longer spend money on -- on the school district. It's forbidden from appropriating for educational purposes. But the residents, since we're talking about the same territorial limits, as the bill says, I see it very definitely costing the residents more money because someone would have to pay for that additional layer of administration who, if you're going to have referenda, someone's gotta organize them. Someone has got to go out and collect the taxes. Someone has -- I'm saying someone, I mean some people -- a staff would have to issue bonds. That would be contracted out, but there would have to be a treasurer who would administer that function. All of those things, and then on top of that if the -- if the school district doesn't have an interest rate as low as the town that would also cost money. I can't imagine that it would not be more costly for the residents of a town.

REP. DELNICKI (14TH): Well, thank you for your answers there, and thank you for coming out and testifying on this piece of legislation. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

REP. LAVIELLE (143RD): Thank you, Representative.

SENATOR CASSANO (4TH): Representative McCarthy Vahey.

REP. MCCARTHY VAHEY (133RD): Thank you, Representative Lavielle. It's wonderful to see you here, and you and I both share a deep passion for the best interests of our children all across the state. And certainly you've had a tremendous commitment to education, and I have admired and
respected to that over the years that I've had the opportunity to work with you. One of the things that I wanted to just touch base on, and while I actually share quite a few of the concerns that you've enumerated, you talked about that connection with the voters if there were to be two separate votes or two separate taxing districts in terms of their ability to have input. And, in some respects, I'll go back to actually what Representative Arnone was referencing earlier -- and I know you certainly have been busy, and it's impossible to listen to everything going on -- but his reference to the concern about parent versus grandparent, or folks with school-age children versus folks who don't have children in school, perhaps that rang true for me a little bit more than the idea that if folks were voting very directly on that school budget separately, that they certainly would have a very clear and direct and intimate impact to that. So, I just wanted to ask you, you know, your thought is you see it as they would have less of a direct impact on it, and if you can just explain that or talk about that a little bit more that would be great.

REP. LAVIELLE (143RD): Sure, thank you for the question and your initial remarks, the feeling is mutual, Representative. So -- but going back to your question -- I think that speaks directly to the concern for oversight of the board of education budget. In the cases that I am familiar with, people who do not have children in the school system, or haven't had recently, feel like there is somewhat greater security in having a body that is not part of the board of education involved with setting revenue limits -- in other words how much
they think can be collected from the town in actually working together with the board of education to say not just how much do you need for your education budget, but how much can the town afford. And I think that if you had -- if you had a board of ed to whom -- of course people do speak to the board of ed directly under the current arrangement, but they also have somewhere else to go to say we can't afford this, or hey you're not spending enough -- the town is willing to pay more -- everybody I know is willing to pay more -- you should go to the school board and tell them they've got a bigger budget. Either way, I think that having that other party involved in the budgeting process is very valuable for not only people with children in the schools, but even more so for people who don't.

REP. MCCARTHY VAHEY (133RD): Thank you for that. I, earlier today, had talked about the fact that we have a great system in Fairfield. We're very fortunate, and we have a town and board of ed who work very well together, and a board of ed that provides a lot of transparency for us. But, that sense of, you know, having the financial oversight with another body, thereby allowing the board of education to remain more solely focused on the educational objectives, I have heard that from many folks.

I did wanna just touch base a little bit on -- if I may, Mr. Chair -- the comment that this is a bill that's addressing a problem that's not out there. And I was interested -- and today has been a very interesting conversation, hearing from folks on both sides of this issue, and one of our first -- one of
the first people who was here today testifying talking about some of the tension that exists between towns and boards of ed currently. And we've heard from folks today who talk about how well it's working when the town and board of ed work together. But my -- my sense is that there are some communities where that type of cohesion and cooperation isn't as prominent or as just beneficial as we might hope it to be. So, I think that's -- and maybe you can comment on this as well, but just that sense that there are some communities where the board of ed feels that the town is not giving them their fair share or their due despite what we've put into statute here, and in other communities its vice versa. So, I think that, again, as I've said to you here, I share many of the concerns that you have expressed, and certainly in thinking about my own community as well as what we've heard from other communities in the state, but I guess what I'm wondering is would you acknowledge that there is that tension between town and board of ed -- that that does happen in terms of the budget negotiation process?

REP. LAVIELLE (143RD): I absolutely would, and sometimes it is contentious. Sometimes it's not. But, I think that at the end of the day, you know, it's government. I think the tension is productive because someone has to be thinking -- someone has to be thinking of the students and their needs -- and again I'm using that word someone, but a body has to be thinking of the students and their needs, and a body has to be thinking of the students' families and everybody else as taxpayers. And I think that those two interests, there is harmony between them at some point, but you need that tension to find
where that harmony is. So I -- I would -- I would counter that it is productive.

REP. MCCARTHY VAHEY (133RD): Thank you very much for the conversation here today. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

REP. LAVIELLE (143RD): Thank you for the opportunity to have it.

SENATOR CASSANO (4TH): Other questions? Seeing none. Representative, thank you very much for joining us. Appreciate it.

REP. LAVIELLE (143RD): Thank you very much.

SENATOR CASSANO (4TH): Okay, I'm gonna -- Mike Glidden is up next, followed by Karen Caffrey on one side here, and then Brian Farnen from the Green Bank, and Terrie Wood -- Representative Wood are the next four. So, up now is Mike Glidden, and then Brian Farnen. Mike, how are you?

MIKE GLIDDEN: Good afternoon. I'm Mike Glidden. The Vice-President of the Connecticut Association of Zoning Enforcement Officials. I'm here concerning House Bill 7208, THE ACT CONCERNING PUBLICATION OF LEGAL NOTICES.

You have our written testimony of opposition of this bill. Really, our issue with the opposition still -- it's not the issue with getting legal notices out, it's the issue that we're running abbreviated notices as you speak. And I polled a few of my member communities, and I'll just throw a few numbers out. It's in my testimony, but for example,
the city of Bristol spends $9,800 dollars this past year in legal notices for land use commissions. My town that I’m employed for, the town of Simsbury, spent $8,352.02 dollars in legal advertisement. One of my members from the town of Old Lyme said it's been a slow year, but they've spent $10,679.50 dollars in legal advertisements. I know that it's not large numbers, but we are already reducing what we put in our legal notices in order to try to save money, and we are not saving money. And more importantly, we are not reaching the public.

One thing, in Simsbury, what we do is we post all of our public notices on the town website, and we, through our web provider, we allow people to subscribe to our town website. So they get an email every time a public -- a public notice is posted, whether it be a notice of a public hearing, an agenda of a commission, etc. With that connection, I have seen people more informed of what's going on in my land use commissions than I have in 13 years prior, where we just really -- we -- in my employment as a -- as a local community official, through just posting on the legal advertisement section of the newspapers.

So, the proposal doesn't solve the problem 'cause it's a two-prong problem. One is the cost that towns face for posting of legal advertisements, and secondly is getting information out. Because the land use process from our perspective works when everyone knows what's going on, and right now, if we're just gonna still stick with the advertisement through the newspaper, we're not reaching the people that really wanna know what's going on in their towns. And that's why we would propose, as CCM
indicated earlier in COST, allowing towns to post the legal notices.

The last thing I'll just say about legal notices, especially when you're looking at it from a land use perspective, it's not just one notice that we post. We'll post -- for example, let's have an application that goes through zoning commission, and it's subject to a public hearing. Well, that notice is published twice in the newspaper for that one application for -- this is prior to the public hearing. After the public hearing, we're posting another legal notice in the newspaper to say what action was taken by the commission. So, I mean, it adds up quick. So, and that's -- in closing, we'd like to really investigate on having the towns be able to post on their web pages rather than newspapers.

SENATOR CASSANO (4TH): Thank you, Mike. A couple of quick questions. This bill has been before us -- I don't know if CCM is still in the room because they'd probably have the numbers that -- that are in the back of my mind. I was interested to hear $11,000 to $12,000 because it used to be $30,000 or $40,000 that was the numbers that were thrown around here on a regular basis. On an annual basis, I know Manchester was close to $50,000. So, those -- if it's down to 10,000 or 15,000, I'm happy because the legislation has worked. I don't think it restricts you but says that you gotta use the newspapers. If you wanna use other resources, you've gotta do that, but seniors, as an example, do not use these cell phones like we do and would never get the notices if we relied on the cell phone.
And so, it's a -- it's a devil's edge -- on the one hand, you wanna reach everybody, and so it's gotta be a combination of both. The original proposal a couple of years ago was basically to abandon the newspapers. And if you recall, I mean, we were overwhelmed by the newspapers and the editors and so on, and the editorials that went with that, and they were expressing and identifying numbers in the $200,000, $300,000, $400,000 dollars in lost revenue just from municipal advertising. So, the numbers are all over the place out there. I'm not so much worried about the numbers, as getting that message out. And you guys are trying to do exactly that, and should have the ability and the freedom to have the flexibility to do both, and I think that should be the goal. That's what we're hopin' the goal is.

MIKE GLIDDEN: Agreed.

SENATOR CASSANO (4TH): Any questions? Or any board members? Yeah, Representative Haines.

REP. HAINES (34TH): Thank you, Mr. Chair. Just some questions regarding your particular situation. How many people do you have in the town that you're speaking of?

MIKE GLIDDEN: Once again, I'm here on behalf of CAZEO, but I work for a town and it's roughly 22,000 people that live in town.

REP. HAINES (34TH): And, I'm sorry, what town is that?

MIKE GLIDDEN: The town of Simsbury.
REP. HAINES (34TH): Oh, okay. Simsbury, okay. And do you have a local newspaper?

MIKE GLIDDEN: We don't.

REP. HAINES (34TH): You do not. Okay, so --

MIKE GLIDDEN: We use the -- we put all of our legal advertisements actually go into the Hartford Courant, so that's our larger paper.

REP. HAINES (34TH): Do you know what the circulation is of the Hartford Courant in Simsbury.

MIKE GLIDDEN: I don't have the subscription -- subscription numbers.

REP. HAINES (34TH): Okay, the only reason I ask that question is because if you had an idea of how many people you were not getting. Do you know how many people you have that are listed as users of your website, in other words, how many people are getting that?

MIKE GLIDDEN: Yes, we do. Right now, I have about a thousand people. I’m sorry -- it's 892 people that are subscribed to my various -- just my land use page. So -- and that could be people who live in town, or just interested builders, or parties. So, like I said, once any action is taken under all those -- the pages of land use -- they receive an email, so they'll know. Like I said, an agenda is filed. A notice -- a notice of action is filed. Meeting minutes are filed, etc., so.
REP. HAINES (34TH): Right, yep. Are there any area newspapers that -- the reason I'm asking about area newspapers because in East Haddam, we started a newspaper. And before we started the newspaper, we actually went to the town and said would you give us your legal notices, and then we wouldn't have to send them to the Hartford Courant. And that -- what happens with our newspaper is it's a free newspaper. It gets delivered to every single person in town. Plus, East Haddam is really weird, we're a small town, large square-footage area, and therefore we have like five post offices. And some of the rural routes, actually -- we actually refer -- we actually deliver some of our papers to Colchester because it's on the same rural route as Lake Hayward, so -- because we have to get it to every household because we have the legal ads.

The point being is -- is that to your point, you need to get everybody in town to get that notice, and you're not serving your town by sending it to just the Hartford Courant. So, I get the whole bill idea about putting it online, 'cause as the Senator stated, you've gotta use a number of different means to do this. So, again, as far as the bill telling you that you can use this, there are other outlets. I know of the Granby Drummer that's up in your area. I don't know if that hits Simsbury at all.

MIKE GLIDDEN: So, the problem -- we have the Farmington Valley Press, which we could use. ["Oh, okay" in background] However, due to the legal requirements of the timings for our advertisements, for example, that application I said that went to a zoning commission that is subject to a public hearing, we have to run two ads prior to the public
hearing, one no more than 15 days and no less than ten, second no more than ten, no less than two of the date of the public hearing. When you're dealing with the weekly newspapers, that's where we get caught in the catch 22, where we can't fulfill our legal requirements for advertisements prior to a public hearing. Vice versa, then also let's say a commission takes an action, we have to run an ad no more than 15 days after the date of action. If we miss any of the submittals for those -- those weekly newspapers, now that application that went through the commission or is going through the commission has a technical defect in it that is subject to an appeal, so therefore you're looking at -- at a door open where an application which could result in economic development is overturned because your legal advertisement was defective.

REP. HAINES (34TH): Right, and I do understand that timing of the -- of the legals, and somehow we were able to fix that, so we can talk offline, and maybe I can send you over to the person who's doin' it and they can tell you how they were able to make it work for legals for weeklies. So, it can work.

MIKE GLIDDEN: Yeah, I've -- I've tried it. Just -- in my office -- we've elected to rather avoid those issues and mainly because my commissions meet on a every other week basis that we said, you know, unfortunately we have to stick with the larger groups. But, I mean, it's not just a Simsbury thing. This is something that my members, which comprise of 110 communities throughout the state of Connecticut, this is -- I hear every year as one of the issues that we'd like our organization to speak
up about the cost, etc., with legal advertisement. So, thank you.

SENATOR CASSANO (4TH): Any other questions? This is kind of -- you guys are kind of stuck because if I recall, and it's somethin' we should look at, is the legislation requires that it be the major newspaper of the area, and in that case it's the Hartford Courant, which is without question the most expensive of the advertising. So, I know the difference was four or five times higher for us east of the river because of the JI that Berlin and South Windsor, Manchester had. So, that's -- that's part of the issue, but the weekly could work if some of the posting requirements are looked at, and that's maybe somethin' that we should be lookin' at is the what we require in the notices to -- the timing of the notices -- because it might make it available to use the weeklies that are delivered on a regular basis, so.

MIKE GLIDDEN: I was just about to say the same thing. It's the timing really, and I appreciate your perspective, Senator Cassano.

SENATOR CASSANO (4TH): All right, somethin' to look into.

MIKE GLIDDEN: Thank you.

SENATOR CASSANO (4TH): All right. Appreciate your testimony.

MIKE GLIDDEN: Thank you.
SENATOR CASSANO (4TH): Thanks very much.
[Background talking]

BRIAN FARNEN: Welcome. Leaders, members of the P and D Committee, good afternoon. My name is Brian Farnen. I am the general counsel and chief legal officer of the Connecticut Green Bank. I am here this morning -- afternoon -- to testify in support of HB 7206.

Over the last seven years, the Green Bank, working with the General Assembly, contractors, private capital providers, DEEP, and the utilities have created a $200 million dollar a year market that is helping to deploy 60 megawatts of clean, renewable energy to help thousands of families reduce their energy burden and create good paying jobs for our residents. We've got a unique perspective of the market for clean energy because it's a mission to -- it's a mission -- it's part of our mission to facilitate the market's growth. The existing exemption for class 1 resources is critical to such projects being economically viable because property taxes levied on a recurring basis can easily erode the economic case for installing clean energy resources and making it less attractive for site owners to host.

The small number of town assessors that are no longer adhering to the exemption for third-party owned residential solar PV systems is an additional cost none of the developers or owners of those solar PV systems expected to have to bear. It will likely make some previously economic solar PV projects unviable, could lead to developers and installers leaving the state, as we've already seen evidence of
one installer not interested in working in a town as that town is no longer upholding the property exemption, and lastly these costs could be passed on to the homeowner, but that is something luckily that has not happened to date, as the parties try to find a solution.

Our written testimony has a much fuller background providing on the ongoing legal issues in the improper assessments of a small minority of towns that gave rise to this bill. It is also worth noting that fuel cells on hospitals and nonprofits, which are critical facilities in our communities receiving reliable power, are facing a similar problem with a related commercial property tax exemption. It would make sense to fix both these issues if the exemption statute is to be clarified.

The Green Bank is often in front of the Energy and Technology Committee, and as members know, state policy is in flux right now, transitioning from the legacy compensation system to a new one. Speaking specifically to the solar PV market, this evolution in state policy is already creating real anxiety in the installer market. These come on top of federal changes, such as the levying of panel import tariffs and also the phase down of the federal tax credit in the coming years.

The clean energy property exemption I speak of today is found in over 30 states, and we were quite frankly surprised that the scope of the exemption is being called into question by a few town assessors, as we believe the existing statutory language is clear and it was always the legislature's intent to exempt both homeowner and third-party owned solar PV systems. This would be a good opportunity to
clarify this long-standing property exemption. I'd be happy to take any questions.


REP. DELNICKI (14TH): Thank you, Mr. Chair. Thank you for coming forward with your testimony. I couldn't help but recognize the mention of fuel cells, which is actually something made here in Connecticut by Connecticut workers, who pay income tax, and the factory pays property tax. So, you see that fuel cells as a key component in being exempt. Is that -- is that correct?

BRIAN FARNEN: Correct. I think -- so, there's two issues. The one with the residential solar has to do with the third-party owned nature in the net metering. For the fuel cells, I feel some of those class 1 resources, their issue relates to the fact that there's two categories of exemptions. There's one for residential use, and the second one is for commercial and industrial use. There's been a few municipalities have looked at the term commercial and industrial, where I think historically that has been seen as everything but non -- but residential. And it's like, well, if it's on a hospital it fits under nonprofit. That's not technically commercial or industrial. So that property tax exemption has not been upheld on a few hospitals, for example. And I don't think that was the legislature's intent at the time of passage.

REP. DELNICKI (14TH): Yeah, it seems to me that it should be a no-brainer that especially nonprofits and hospitals should be, without a doubt, part of
that exemption. So, what you're suggesting is a language change to make sure that we incorporate fuel cells also.

BRIAN FARNEN: Yes, it's really a clarification. I mean --

REP. DELNICKI (14TH): Clarification, okay.

BRIAN FARNEN: We believe that the current existing statute is sufficient for both exemptions, but because they're being challenged, you know, it's costly, attorney fees, all those different things. I think it would be good to get a clarification.

REP. DELNICKI (14TH): So that way everybody would be playing with the same rules?

BRIAN FARNEN: Correct.

REP. DELNICKI (14TH): Thank you for your testimony. Thank you for your answers to the questions, and thank you, Mr. Chair.

SENATOR CASSANO (4TH): It helps me understand a little better too. Appreciate it. Any other questions? I’m sorry -- Madam Chair.

REP. MCCARTHY VAHEY (133RD): Thank you, Mr. Chair, and thank you, Brian, for being here today and for all the good work that you're doing with the Green Bank to try and help promote renewable energy. Certainly, as a fellow Fairfielder, it's great to see you here, and in a coastal community, we know very well how important it is that we're addressing these issues for our future -- the safety, actually,
of our residents, particularly those who are living by -- down by the water.

So, I just -- I really wanted to say thank you. I do think that it is important that we clarify the language so that there isn't confusion, because I think to be fair to the assessors, they're trying to interpret and, you know, understand what the intent was, and doing the best they can with that language. So, I think that clarifying more specific language will help that. So, thanks for being here today.

BRIAN FARNEN: Thank you very much, Representative.

SENATOR CASSANO (4TH): [Crosstalk] Representative Arnone, question?

REP. ARNONE (58TH): Yeah, so again, to clarify exactly when we get into commercial and rooftop, the certain -- you know, the specific areas you're talking about. So, if you could just go over that again for me too just to clarify that.

BRIAN FARNEN: Sure, so there's two exemptions. There's one that says that if you are a class 1 resource, which means, you know, not -- so, you take solar PV as a great example of a class 1 resource, clean energy. So, that exemption currently says that it has to be for residential use. There's a question -- so, 70 percent of the market for residential solar PV is a third-party owned system. So, think of those as the leases, the power purchase agreements, and the reason why it takes up 70 percent of the market is 'cause it's a no money down solution. So, a lot of people, it's a lot easier to, you know, go forward with that approach, put no
money down, understanding that someone else is gonna take care of your system if there's an issue with it. So, that exemption has been questioned by at least 14 towns, and that relates to -- well, is that for residential use if a third-party owns it, but at the -- owns the system -- but at the end day, all the energy being produced is for the use at that residence.

At the time of the original passing of the exemption, it was -- I think it was understood when they talked about, you know, in those types of testimony at that time, it was always talking about the solar industry, encouraging the solar industry, and the fact of the matter is since 70 percent is this third-party owned, it's almost like there's some perceived ambiguity in the statute, and that's where I think some of the assessors are saying, okay, you know, maybe there's a potential opportunity here.

And then on the second issue regarding -- and then there's the second exemption for commercial or industrial purposes, and that's where the fuel cells, I think, are getting tripped up right now. Because say there's a fuel cell on a hospital, then the question is, well, you know, is that a hospital or is that nonprofit? It's not residential use, and is that technically commercial or industrial. I think, you know, no one was tryin' to carve out from the exemption, you know, churches are nonprofits. From a public policy perspective, that was nothing we saw in any way in the record. So, I think, you know, I personally don't believe a clarification is necessary, but because of the fact that it's being challenged, clarifying -- you know, clarifying the
statute would hopefully put an end to all the litigation and the cost involved.

REP. ARNONE (58TH): So, it also mentions net metering, so I wanted to get off of the fuel cell, and if we do get the, you know, solar panel and net metering or large commercial, you know, solar farms in a town that this doesn't --

BRIAN FARNEN: Correct. So, for -- in relationship to net metering, so the one thing to remember is the energy that is being sold from the solar PV system, 100 percent of that electricity is sold to the homeowner. And then once it is sold to the homeowner, there are gonna be times when that homeowner can't use it, for example, they're at work, and then through state policy what happens is some of that energy is -- is transferred to the grid as a bill credit for that homeowner. And then, you know, when they use their energy later in the day, that'll count against that earlier energy that was, you know, transitioned to the grid, and that's the net metering statute and that relates to the homeowners receiving the utility rate of energy up to a point. Now there's talk -- now there's been a transition to a tariff approach that they're currently -- that was passed last session that they're talking about again in Energy and Technology Committee primarily. And that tariff approach is more of a fixed rate, and there's a couple different options. You can do a scenario where all of your energy is sold to the grid, kind of a buy-all, sell-all approach at a fixed price. And then there's another potential option where you would use all of your energy, but the excess energy would be basically sold -- would receive a certain tariff
price to go into the grid, but that's all rate design type issues and things like that.

REP. ARNONE (58TH): Thanks.


BRIAN FARNEN: Thank you.

REP. DOUCETTE (13TH): [Background talking] Thank you, Senator Cassano, and members of the Planning and Development Committee. I'm here today in support of Senate Bill 972, AN ACT CONCERNING ADOPTEE RIGHTS FOR BIRTH RECORDS, and I'm really here today joined by my constituent and good friend, Karen Caffrey. Karen introduced this issue to me, and she has worked tirelessly on it on behalf of all adult adopted persons seeking their birth records. She's taken the time to educate me on this issue, and I'm grateful to her for that, and I believe it is an issue of civil rights, of human rights, of women's rights. I think it's a good policy for this state, and Karen has explained to me over the years how our policy as a state has changed from time to time, and she can speak to that as well. But, I think, going forward, this really modernizes our policy as a state on this issue and provides adult persons access to their -- their history, their genetic history, their, again, civil rights, I believe. So, with that, I'll yield my time to Karen.

KAREN CAFFREY: Thank you, Representative Doucette. My name is Karen Caffrey. I'm from Manchester, and I am an adoptee. I'm also president of Access
Connecticut, which is a nonprofit, all-volunteer organization of adoptees, birth parents, adoptive parents, and adoptive professionals, and we do support SB 972, AN ACT CONCERNING ACCESS TO ORIGINAL BIRTH RECORDS BY ADULT ADOPTED PERSONS.

I was here at the beginning of the hearing, and I did hear that the legislators have read -- do read the testimony, and we wanna thank you because we -- we have an embarrassment of riches and have close to 300 testimonies submitted in support of this bill. If any of you want it, we actually, as of yesterday afternoon, did an index of the testimonies that shows who's an adoptee, who's a birth parent, who's an adoption professional, and they're here if you want them. If you'd like one, I'll pass a couple this way. We have about -- again, as of yesterday afternoon, we have about 100 adoptee testimonies, a little bit fewer than that birth parents.

The bill, as it's written now, I understand is gonna have some substitute language. It's following up on Public Act 14-133, which applied to post-October 1, 1983, adult adoptees, and that's been administered by the Department of Public Health. We're here in this committee because we're going to -- the plan is to change that scheme so that adult adoptees could go directly to their town hall and get their original birth certificate.

To explain it very simply, I actually went -- I was born in Middletown, Connecticut, and I actually went to the town hall in January, and I got a copy of this document. This is my legal birth certificate. It has a nice little raised stamp on it, and it's an official government document. It's also a lie.
This is a false document. This document says that a woman, my mother, my adoptive mother, Lucille Ostrager [phonetic] gave birth to me in 1959 at Middlesex Hospital at a certain time, I was a certain weight. This is not true, although this is my legal birth certificate. This was designed to protect me. This law that created this thing was implemented in 1935 and was designed to protect me and people like me from the stigma of illegitimacy or bastardy, if we wanna use a real old-fashioned word.

This document, and this is what the fuss is all about, this is my original true birth certificate. It looks just like this one, except it has the name of the -- my biological parents on it -- the people who -- the woman who actually gave birth to me and my birth father. I no longer have the right to this document. Until 1975, all adult adoptees and their adoptive parents had the right to walk into their town hall, just like I did to get this false document in January, and get a copy of this true original. This is now under lock and key, and I'm not allowed to have it because I was born and adopted before October 1, 1983, in Connecticut. So, that's a real simple primer about what [ringing] all the fuss is about, and that took me three minutes. I can say more, but I wanna respect the committee's time. I will say, we are trying to -- we did not ask all our supporters to come here today. We only have a few people testifying. So, I’m happy to answer questions, and there's a lot to be said, but that's -- that's the gist of it.

SENATOR CASSANO (4TH): All right, let me just call it before I start. Representative Haines and
Representative Michel, but I did ask -- we've had in past years literally more than a hundred people here to testify. This list, they would be testifying today. I asked Karen if they would just submit their names instead of all of -- everybody testifying because they would, and they have because this is an issue of discrimination without question. I've introduced this bill to the Senate through the Senate -- it's a Senate bill -- because I believe -- I just believe that it's not right. Representative Delnicki, I remember his comments during the session last year. Wow -- this hits me. It hits a lot of people, and we don't understand it. And Karen, I wanna thank you, and I wanna thank you for tryin' to work with us so that we're gonna get outta here before midnight.

KAREN CAFFREY: We tried. I think I shoulda brought my pajamas. [Laughing]

SENATOR CASSANO (4TH): But you're literally -- I know that in a snap of a finger there would be a hundred more people here to testify, and so we owe ya.

KAREN CAFFREY: And we thank you for considering the bill. Yes.

SENATOR CASSANO (4TH): Representative Haines. I'm sorry. [Background talking]

REP. HAINES (34TH): Thank you, Mr. Chair. Thank you for being here. I actually just found out that I'm in the same club as Representative Delnicki 'cause I was adopted as well.
KAREN CAFFREY: Oh, we are a legion.

REP. HAINES (34TH): I’m sorry, say that again.

KAREN CAFFREY: There are many of us. We're everywhere.

REP. HAINES (34TH): Oh, I was in Jersey. I'm a Jersey girl. So, when I wanted to find out was many times over the course of my life, and I finally got around to getting enough courage to write a letter to Catholic Family Charities in Newark, New Jersey, when I was in college. And I got a note back saying send us $35 dollars and we'll give you non-identifying information, and then I sent them a check and it bounced -- 'cause I was a college kid -- [laughing] and I told my parents this story later in life, and they laughed too because the check bounced. But anyway, so eventually I got this handwritten note of information about the baby, about the adoptive parents, and that was it. And part of the reason I did it was because I was born in '61, and there was a whole bunch of news in the -- news in the -- information in the news about women who took a certain drug, like in the '70s, and I forget exactly what that was, but I was like well '60s-'70s, close enough. [Background talking] So, I wanted to really get medical information. I was more concerned about that.

The information I got was, you know, very little. But the -- but what it did give me, and this is my question -- what it did give me, and I've thought about it again and again, and the fact that well maybe I should go find out what their names are and all this kind of stuff -- what it did give me was
time. Because at 18, I wasn't ready to even get the information, and get the information and do the right thing with that information at 18. I was way too young. I'm 57 now, and I'm not sure what to do with the information if I got it yet. Because the one thing that this information does is it's not just my information is it? It's the information of my birth mother, who thankfully in 1961 had me, and here I am today as a representative in the state of Connecticut, and I had wonderful opportunity. Not everybody's story is as great as mine, and I understand that. But at the same time I value what she did, and I value the fact that out of wedlock she had me, and she kept me for an entire month, and then gave me up, and then it took her another year before she signed off on me to give me up fully, and then I could get adopted a month later. So she anguished over that, as I'm sure everybody does when they have a baby and then they give it up. But, at the same time, she went back to her husband who didn't know anything about me.

So, now I have the information 'cause I've gotten my original birth certificate. Do I go back and get in touch with her? Do I find out if there's other family? Nobody knows about me, and nobody -- you don't know what side of the fence the stigma is on. So, this is -- this is touchy. And as much as we have the right at 18 to have all the facts, we don't own the facts by ourselves. These facts are a group of people and owned by that group of people. So before you release facts to one side, what happens to the other side?

So, I know I'm asking a question that is kinda weird from an adoptee, but it's something that I've
thought about for a lot of years. And it's something that we have to consider. And I just wanna know your thoughts on that side.

KAREN CAFFREY: I think you're expressing a lot of fears that are the outgrowth of the era of stigma and shame that women faced -- I'm about the same age as you are, I was born in 1959 -- they faced at this time. There is sort of a mist around adoption from this era, and around adoption in general, that these were, you know, voluntary, loving -- not that they weren't loving but -- voluntary relinquishments, that women forgot about their babies and went on, and everything was fine.

It's sort of like a fairy tale myth. There was -- there's a great deal of testimony here, and I could -- numerous testimonies, I could review them with you, of women talking about the shame that they lived in for years, the embarrassment about -- about telling lies because they didn't disclose the truth about their past -- depression, anxiety, yearning for their children that were lost, having no options. You know, it's not a choice if you don't have an option. It's not a choice if your family rejects you, and you're kicked out of school, and you're fired from your job, and you have no way to support yourself or your child.

These women were, in fact, almost all of them, highly traumatized and mistreated. They were not protected in any sense that we understand what it means to protect somebody today, and I, by the way, am very suspicious of women-protective legislation in general -- of adult women. You know, as a -- as a -- by the way, we don't know who your birth mother or father did or did not tell. It's frequently the
case, some birth parents, some women or men tell no one. Some tell their spouse. Some do tell their children. Someone very close to me, his daughter, who is an adoptee, did a DNA search a year-and-a-half ago, and within 48 hours -- took an Ancestry.com DNA test, which everybody is doing now -- I don't know how we can't turn on the television without seeing one -- $59 dollars on sale this week if anyone wants one -- within 48 hours of getting her results, she was on the phone to his birth sister. And all -- his birth mother was still alive. All of his siblings were aware of him. They had all been looking for him and praying that he would show up for 60 years. Now, it could turn out that way, could turn out another way.

What I'm hearing, just in a personal way, what I'm hearing is that you are feeling the uncertainties and fears of having -- of this legacy that people like you and I came out of. I'm sorry.

REP. HAINES (34TH): That's not it at all.

KAREN CAFFREY: Well, at first, I thought I heard you say at first you were disturbed or somehow --

REP. HAINES (34TH): So, my point is that that birth certificate, I'm not the only person on that birth certificate.

KAREN CAFFREY: True, yeah.

REP. HAINES (34TH): There's a birth mother and maybe a birth father that's on that birth certificate, and they have a -- they have a protected identity on that birth certificate as
well. So, before I open -- before the state opens up a birth certificate because I have rights as the 18-year-old adoptee, what about the other two people on that birth certificate? Are they being protected by opening up that certificate, or are they not?

KAREN CAFFREY: So, what I would say to that is, information that is jointly owned isn't -- can be jointly shared. It's like having a joint bank account or owning your property together with your spouse. In addition to which, I would say that a birth -- actually, the purpose of a birth certificate is to document a birth. It pertains to my birth. Yes, there was somebody else present, obviously. Every other citizen gets their birth certificate, no questions asked. They don't have to ask their mother or their father or anybody else. The presumption in the law is that citizens get their birth certificate.

We're being excluded from that presumption for all of these historical reasons that have to do with -- with frankly very anti-women values and functions in society. So, I mean that's, I think -- I see it as our birth certificate, our birth. Birth certificates are not shared with the public -- regular people or non-adopted people's birth certificates. I'm not suggesting this be put on the front page of the Hartford Courant. I'm saying that the interested parties should be able to get the birth certificate.

Although, in this case, by the way, this bill does not say that birth parents can get a copy of the adoptee's birth certificate. The non-adopted, your parents can get a copy. There's a class of people...
who can get a person's birth certificate -- the individual, their parents, I think their spouse, a few other folks. This is just saying only the adoptee and the adoptee's adult children and grandchildren can get the birth certificate. There's obviously a lot of health reasons for having this kind of information as well -- as well as it being a civil right and a human right.

REP. HAINES (34TH): If you don't mind, just one followup. Is the birth certificate that is the lie, does that have you on there born on a certain day at a certain time in a certain place?

KAREN CAFFREY: Yes, it's exactly -- it's not structured the same. The purpose is -- is it's identical to my real -- my original true birth certificate. The purpose is to allow the adoptee to pass as legitimate. That's the original purpose of this dual system. The 1935 legislative history, which I actually did dig out, talks about good -- that's when there was only one birth certificate and adoptees were called foster children, what if somebody should get their hand on that and find out where this -- and she goes to get married, and she gives this birth certificate, and everyone in town knows her origins. Good heavens, she could be blackmailed -- how horrible that would be. So, the intent is to allow us to pass and to be -- and to legitimize and form the family structure of the adopted family 'cause the certificate --

REP. HAINES (34TH): But the certificate does have you born on such a date at such a time?
KAREN CAFFREY: Same date, same place, says it's the same doctor.

REP. HAINES (34TH): Okay.

KAREN CAFFREY: It substitutes my adoptive parents' names and address, and it's also a name change document. This is how adoptees' names are changed from their birth name to their adopted name. So, this is my legal -- this is my legal name now.

REP. HAINES (34TH): So, your birth parents gave you a certain name, and your adoptive parents gave you a different name.

KAREN CAFFREY: Exactly.

REP. HAINES (34TH): Okay.

KAREN CAFFREY: And they were created about a year apart. The original birth certificate is, by law, for everybody created within seven days of the birth event, and these -- the amended birth certificate is created the time adoption is finalized. It could be months or even years later.

REP. HAINES (34TH): Okay. Thank you very much. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

REP. DELNICKI (14TH): Thank you, Mr. Chair, and thank you coming -- for coming forward here today.

KAREN CAFFREY: Thank you.

REP. DELNICKI (14TH): I talk about a lot of things in my life -- just that kind of a person -- and
quite frankly, there was a stigma around adoption for years. I found out when I was 12 years old that I was adopted by my grandparents. To that point, I had no idea that I was adopted by my grandparents, and that was a blessing, a blessing I hold very dear to my heart. But when I think about graduating South Windsor High in 1974, and in 1975 the law being changed, and that was 45 years ago or thereabouts, and quite frankly, I can totally understand the stigma in the '50s and the '60s and the '70s that was around that because that was kinda like -- you wouldn't wanna talk about it. And even to this day sometimes I have a little trouble talking about it, but -- but I am. And I carry a unique perspective here. I knew who my mother was, but I don't -- didn't know who my father was until my grandparents passed on -- and I’m saying biological mother, biological father because I was blessed. My grandparents were my parents that raised me, that I held true as my parents.

So, it wasn't until I handled the estate that I actually got the original documents because they were locked away in a safety deposit box, and in some ways it was a comfort to get them because it brought closure to the issue -- never changed how I felt about my parents, who are my biological grandparents. I almost have to have a chart up on the wall when I talk about this. [Laughing] But to literally lock that information away, and I fully understand why it was done, and I fully appreciate why it was done, and I fully accept why it was done at that timeframe -- we're in 2019, and a lot of things have changed there. And when I consider the fact that -- that literally there is one document that every other person born in the state of
Connecticut has legal access to unequivocally, without question, except for adoptees, and that's their original birth certificate, I dare say, with the exception of my dear friend here and the folks in the audience that have that same situation, of course, that it's almost like -- and I hate using terminology but I have to say it -- to me, it's a civil rights issue, it really is, that there would be two standards there.

But again, I fully understand and fully appreciate the underlying reason why it was such. But I also understand that, you know, you talked about Ancestry.com. You talked about, well, not 23andMe. You talk about you send away and you conceivably get the information, but there should be a right for a person to be able to have that. It's truly treating a group of people far differently than every single other person that is not in that group in the state of Connecticut. That's -- those are my thoughts on it, and my question to you, 'cause I made a longwinded statement here, is do you see it as a civil rights issue -- and I ask that to both my dear friend, Representative, and yourself? Do you see it as a civil rights issue?

KAREN CAFFREY: I do, and I see it as a human rights issue. You know, we -- I was adopted as an infant, and I had no -- I couldn't consent. I had no lawyer. I had no representation. I was amputated from my biological family tree and given no -- and actually, frankly, at the time it happened, I had the right to my original birth certificate. I actually searched and found my birth family 40 years ago because I had my -- I had my birth name. I have my papers here today with me. We compared ours last
year. I have my adoption decree. This was the law. I'm actually seeking to get something -- a right back that I already had -- and 39,600 others of my friends, which is the number of adoptees adopted in Connecticut before October 1, 1983.

So, yes, I do see it as a human rights issue. I see it as essential to being human. You know, we talked in a very different context about connection today and people working together and us being part of the same community, and there -- and for reasons that I also understand, it is unfair for us to judge today what people did 50 years ago based on their values and their understanding of what was best. I am not judging them. What I am saying is -- but neither is it fair to turn a blind eye to the unintended harmful consequences of those actions those many years ago, and we know now they are harmful. Adoption is not practiced this way today. We know it harms not only adoptees, it harms birth parents, it harms adoptive families. This isn't healthy. And, to the one issue about -- I'm gonna mention something about DNA testing, although somebody's gonna -- a genetic genealogist is gonna testify a little later. Oddly, after all the years I've worked on this bill, this bill is actually the more private option for birth parents and adoptees than consumer DNA testing.

With a birth certificate, you have the name of a person, which is what I had. I eventually was able to make a private direct phone call to my birth parents. With consumer DNA testing, and I don't know how many people may have tested in this room, but you send your test away, and what comes back in your little inbox is the names and contact
information of every biological relative who's already tested. It doesn't matter if your birth parents haven't tested -- if anybody in the family tree has tested -- a half-sibling, a niece, a nephew, a first cousin, a second cousin. We have some testimonies in here from adoptees. Marge Morrison [phonetic] -- her husband did a test, and they found his cousin was living down the street. The cousin found out about the search before the birth mother did. This is happening all the time. If we don't give adoptees their birth certificates, they're gonna take their DNA test, out themselves and their birth parents relinquishment to everybody in the family tree, who'll all be talking. When, in fact, with the birth certificate, they could make a private phone call. And I thought I'd never live to see the day that this was the private option, but it actually is.

REP. DELNICKI (14TH): And, for the record, I'm fourth-generation Delnicki in South Windsor.

KAREN CAFFREY: [Cheering] Awesome.

REP. DELNICKI (14TH): Legally, I'm third, but biologically I'm fourth generation there, so [laughing] -- just in case anyone looks at my biography where I mention fourth generation.

KAREN CAFFREY: Well, I am -- I am an eighth-generation descendant biologically of the Daughters -- I qualify for membership in the Daughters of the Republic of Texas. I'm an eighth-generation descendant of one of the founding families of the state -- the Republic, as they called it back then, of Texas. I'm proud of both my heritages, and we
should all be proud of all of our heritages and not have to sacrifice one.

REP. DELNICKI (14TH): Well, I appreciate you coming forward and testifying, and thank you to the Chairman.

KAREN CAFFREY: Thank you.

SENATOR CASSANO (4TH): Representative Michel and then Arnone.

REP. MICHEL (146TH): Thank you, Chair Cassano. Thank you both for testifying, and thank you, Representative Haines and Delnicki, for sharing also your life experience.

Would expanding the access be in conflict with an agreement established by law?

KAREN CAFFREY: Are you talking about like a possible agreement with birth parents?

REP. MICHEL (146TH): Yes.

KAREN CAFFREY: Well, almost all the -- no, the answer is no. If you wanna see -- if you wanna see a copy of the statute as it existed before -- is that enough --

REP. MICHEL (146TH): Sure. I guess it would be -- the statute is -- I think it's in the bill.

KAREN CAFFREY: It's actually not in the bill, but the testimony of Desiree Stephens, who's on our board, has a copy of the statute as it existed before 1975. I could also provide you a copy.
There is one testimony in opposition to this bill that makes the allegation -- makes the statement that there were agreements of confidentiality with birth mothers. And this is -- this is the myth -- that there were such agreements. I've never seen one, literally, in writing. One has never been produced.

There's a University of Baltimore law professor named Elizabeth Samuels. She also has testimony here. She did a nationwide search for written agreements between birth mothers or fathers, and whoever -- adoption agencies -- in which they were promised privacy or confidentiality. She couldn't find one, and the few documents she did find, 40 percent of them admonished the birth parent to respect the adoptive family's privacy and not interfere with the child. The real thing that was going on, why they made such a draconian separation between birth and adoptive families, is the fear that the birth mother would want her child back. It's very hard to pressure and ostracize a woman enough to make her give up her child or force her to give up her child. It takes a lot of effort. So, there are no such agreements.

In Connecticut, should any such agreement have been made, certainly before 1975, that would've been contrary to existing law. Just -- I'm there's no -- there's no -- I'm also an attorney. I practiced law for ten years. It's pretty straightforward. The statute's black and white. So, if they were made, they were poor practice, malpractice -- misinforming the person who it was made with, and I think, at the time, certainly unenforceable. The state wouldn't have had to comply with them, so.
REP. MICHEL (146TH): Okay, thank you, and through Mr. Chair, polling Representative Haines, I wanted to ask would birth parents be notified of the request, or --?

KAREN CAFFREY: They would not be. There is what's called a contact preference form provision that exists under existing law for post '83 adoptees. The birth parent can file both a contact preference form and an updated medical history form with the Department of Children and Families. As of date, I'm not gonna do this exactly right, but there have been about anywhere from like ten to 35 a year, a little bit less than that filed with DCF. Interestingly, all of them are what we call positive, saying yes I do want contact, here's my address and phone number. Nationwide about one out of 2,000 negative -- in other words, don't contact me -- contract preference forms are filed, based on the experience of other states who have implemented similar legislation, but it's a tiny, tiny percentage nationwide. And, just to end this, just so you know, I actually co-sponsored the bill earlier today. So, thank you. [Laughing]

KAREN CAFFREY: Thank you so much. Much appreciated.

REP. MICHEL (146TH): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

SENATOR CASSANO (4TH): Representative Arnone.

REP. ARNONE (58TH): Thank you, Mr. Chair. So, former state representative David Alexander was a champion of this bill --
KAREN CAFFREY: Yes, he was behind --

REP. ARNONE (58TH): -- in the 58th, and I represent the 58th now, and I wanted to mention his name for the record 'cause I know how much this meant to him. We spent many a day talking about it. So, I sit in his seat, and I feel the same way he does about this bill. So, thank you very much.

KAREN CAFFREY: Thank you. He did a wonderful thing for adoptees.

SENATOR CASSANO (4TH): Representative McCarthy Vahey.

REP. MCCARTHY VAHEY (133RD): Thank you, Mr. Chair, and thank you both for being here. I am sorry that I was out of the room for your testimony, but I will watch it later, and I have really appreciated working together with you on this issue. I had not co-sponsored the bill, and when I did just now, I saw that Representative Doucette has co-sponsored it twice actually.

KAREN CAFFREY: He really cares. [Laughing]

REP. MCCARTHY VAHEY (133RD): So, I -- I just wanted to ask you -- you said something that struck me. You said adoption is not practiced this way today. Can you -- can you explain what you mean by that?

KAREN CAFFREY: Yes, most -- 95 percent of adoptions today are practiced with some degree of what we call openness. That does not mean open adoption in terms of co-parenting, although there are some people who
almost do that. It's more that there is -- that the identities of the parties are increasingly known to each other. It's been done for reasons of mental wellness. As our -- our psychological understanding of the impact of secrecy on the parties involved has improved, and we've realized the harm, the movement began to keep connection, to exchange information, and also frankly updated current medical information. What's happening now in America is that genetic secrecy is coming to an end. If you go on Facebook and look up the group DNA Detectives, there are 110,000 members. Everybody is taking DNA tests, and they are finding a lot of surprises -- not just the non-adopted.

So, I don't know, not everybody believes the truth will set you free, but the truth is gonna set us free whether we wanna be set free or not. And, in adoption at least, the understanding -- the current modern understanding of what's the best practice for everyone involved is to make sure that people have information about each other, and the relationships that fit for them.

REP. MCCARTHY VAHEY (133RD): I wanna thank you for that answer, and as is often the question here, we sometimes ask questions that we may know the answers to. And, in this case, I was a post-adoption social worker for a period of time in my life, and I just -- I wanna thank you and my fellow representatives here on the committee and all those who have submitted testimony. It certainly was a different era, and I, like you, would never judge, ever. There is no way to know what is in people's hearts, and the kind of pain and struggle that they have as they are making those decisions, whether they felt
they were forced or otherwise. But, we do know today, just like we've learned when it comes to trauma research or wearing helmets or so many other things, that this type of practice is so much better, especially as we look at teens and their identity formation and understanding of who they are. And I certainly respect the other issues as Representative Delnicki said from a civil rights standpoint as well as from a health perspective. I think all of those things are very compelling reasons. It doesn't negate the pain and the struggle of all the parties involved and all those who are on that birth certificate, but I just -- I wanna thank you both again for your tireless advocacy on this issue.

KAREN CAFFREY: Thank you for your support.


KAREN CAFFREY: Thank you, Senator. Thank you.

SENATOR CASSANO (4TH): Jonathan Harris. Cori Mackey. [Crosstalk] Cori Mackey and then Jonathan Harris.

CORI MACKEY: Good afternoon. My name is Cori Mackey, and I am here in opposition to House Bill 7318, AN ACT CONCERNING REVISIONS TO THE UNIFORM RELOCATION ASSISTANCE ACT. I'm the Executive Director of the Christian Activities Council. We are the organization that has been most recently working with tenants in the north end of Hartford to address their deplorable living conditions, having relocated some almost 285 families out of 40
buildings, which is separate from this issue, but it's to say that we've been mired in tenant-landlord issues for a long time and in close relationship with the Department of License and Inspections, which is charged with issuing vacate orders when necessary.

We became involved with the Relocation Act back in August of 2015, when 18 families were vacated across the street from our apartment -- or from our office on Vine Street. We went to visit them in the Super 8 Motel, where they were transported by the Red Cross. We did not know of the Relocation Act at that time, and the city was not complying with it. These tenants were given two weeks to find someplace else to live before they were instructed to enter the homeless system, the shelter system, in Hartford.

We learned through Greater Hartford Legal Aid of the Relocation Act and organized to force the city to comply and properly relocate these residents, giving them access to the relocation benefits they should receive. Without the relocation benefits, through no fault of their own, they would have ended up in a homeless shelter, many with children, for months on end while they found a new place to live. The Super 8 Motel that they did stay in throughout the relocation process provided no means for them to prepare meals, so they relied on a small microwave the entire time they were there, with babies and children in tow. It was located next to an adult entertainment center, no access to the bus without a pretty significant walk with a number of elderly families. And every morning they would awake to the hotel manager telling them they needed to be out by
11 a.m. because the landlord and then the city had not paid for the next night's stay, and we'd have to advocate to make sure they got that night paid for, creating incredible stress for families already in a compromised situation.

Furthermore, once a vacate issue is ordered, municipalities are very hesitant to issue vacate orders. When they do, it is almost always because of months and months of neglect by a negligent landlord. The notion that providing an extra 30 days for that landlord to miraculously cure the issues causing the vacate is simply unreasonable. There will be a good landlord here and there caught in the midst of this policy, but they are few and far between, because good landlords do not let their properties get to this condition. It's just -- it doesn't happen.

The bureaucratic nightmare, the paperwork that already exists within the Relocation Act for the residents is difficult. They rely on their landlord to do the right thing, which often doesn't happen, which is why they're in this situation to begin with. With the case of the Vine Street residents, their landlord was responsible for boarding up the building the night of their vacate. That did not happen, so the building was looted. Their mattresses were stolen, their TVs were stolen -- never to be recovered. And again, it was only through the assistance of the Relocation Act that they were able to land on their feet with money that was deemed appropriate back in 1971, so barely effective or efficient for today, but nonetheless, it was what allowed them to have a proper relocation in the end and get back on their feet. So, I
strongly encourage you to not support this bill, and I'd be happy to answer any questions.

SENATOR CASSANO (4TH): Questions? Madam Chair.

REP. MCCARTHY VAHEY (133RD): Thank you, Mr. Chair, and thank you for being here with us today. You may have heard me earlier ask the -- one of the folks who testified with respect to this bill, if we were to have a conversation and have various folks sitting around the table, who should be present, and I would ask you the same. What's your thought on that?

CORI MACKEY: I think tenants who have been through the relocation process should be very well represented as well as those who have worked to secure the rights of those tenants who have been denied these benefits in the past -- housing advocates.

REP. MCCARTHY VAHEY (133RD): Thank you. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

SENATOR CASSANO (4TH): Any other questions? Thank you for your testimony.

CORI MACKEY: Thank you.

SENATOR CASSANO (4TH): Jonathan Harris.

[Background talking]

JONATHAN HARRIS: Thank you, Representative. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Mr. Chairman, Co-Chair McCarthy Vahey, Ranking Members Champagne and Zawistowski, thank you for having me here. Jonathan Harris,
Undersecretary at OPM, coming in support of Senate Bill Number 1009. I thank you for your patience, for raising the bill, for your endurance, especially on this tough day having lost a friend and a colleague that we’ve served with.

I will quickly paraphrase the sections in the bill that are technical and minor in nature, and you can ask some questions. The first section involves special taxing districts, whether it's fire, sewer, flood, water -- it simplifies the reporting that the district has to do to the town, and very important to us, it requires the district to report tax levy and mill rate information to OPM because we need that to calculate municipal aid in a timely fashion. So, it makes sure that we get the information that we need.

Section two and three, I'm gonna spare you the two or three hours of reading I did on tax exemptions. You can look at the statutes. You can take a look at our handbook, but I will tell you, in general terms, for veterans there is a set of mandatory exemptions that you get based on your status as a veteran if you're in the service, spouse, minor child, widow, etc., surviving kids. Then there is another layer of additional exemptions, where income starts to play a role, and then -- and that's also mandatory -- and then the top layer, which is what section two deals with, is an additional exemption for 100 percent disabled veterans that also has -- has an income.

And what we wanna clarify in section two is that in this third layer that's permissive to the towns, it just doesn't go by adjusted gross income, as do all
the other additional exemptions in that second layer. It adds other income, like social security. So veterans that wanna take advantage of that particular one -- 100 percent disabled veterans -- might get knocked out of the ability to do that because their income will be higher than if you just took a look at the adjusted gross income.

Section three deals with that second layer of additional veterans' exemptions. All nine of the veterans' exemptions that we're talking about in that -- in that first layer basically are portable. So, if I qualify in a municipality, and then I move within the tax year and I file with the new town, then I'm able to take advantage of that exemption in my new town. For some reason, when it comes to the additional veterans' exemption, those eligible veterans are not allowed portability on -- on that piece, even though they are allowed portability on their basic -- that first level, the basic status. So, it's allowing portability.

Section four and five involve renter's rebate. Four is pretty simple. It basically just conforms to practice. It is OPM, not the Housing Commissioner that administers this.

Section five eliminates an extension of time for renters to apply. So, if you're a renter, and you are within the eligible income limits, you can apply between April 1 and October 1. It used to be between May 15 and September 15, so it's been expanded to six months. And you're able to get a rebate, depending on your income level, on your rent that you paid in the previous calendar year. We'd like to get rid of an additional period of time, an
extension from October 1 to December 15, where a renter can apply if they have been ill or incapacitated because it presents problems. We actually have a deadline of October 15 to be able to certify all of the applications that we get from the towns, and we're required to make payment on them by October 30. Since there's an extension period that goes over a month beyond that, almost two months beyond that, we have to hold back $200,000 or $300,000 dollars to be able -- and prorate what the renters actually get that timely filed -- to be able to anticipate the potential extensions of time. It would be much smoother to administer, and it also would give those timely filing renters -- again, six months they have -- to be able to get the full amount of the rebate as opposed to the reduced amount.

Section six involves what's called a public scoping process under the Connecticut Environmental Protection Act. It basically is a way to have public comment before decisions are made by agencies to direct state money towards certain types of capital and other types of projects. What's happened is that the requirement for the -- in scoping has required agencies to consult OPM in too many situations, and as a result, it sometimes doesn't happen. We're actually asked to report to this body every year on whether state actions, what the agencies do to get money, complies with the state plan of conservation and development involved in that continuing Committee on Planning and Development, which I served on in my six years as Vice-Chair of this esteemed committee. And what we'd like to do is limit the times that the state agencies actually have to come to OPM for that
advice, but make sure that they do come to it -- to us and make sure that we give them the advice, so (1) the public input is meaningful before the money is given out, and (2) so that we actually have the information that we need to be able to report to you, as we're required by law to do.

The final section involves neglected cemeteries and a fund that we've had -- I think it's been in place since about 2015. You know, neglected cemeteries typically are historical burial places. Right now, we're allowed to give grants to municipalities, but if that ancient burial ground, we'll say, is in an association, the law says that we can't. We'd like to get rid of that -- that wall that would say that if a cemetery is run by an association, even though it's municipal, that they're not entitled to the grant to be able to cut the grass, do what they need to do, make sure that the cemetery is maintained.

There's also a limitation in that we're only allowed, or the municipality and the people operating the cemetery are only allowed to straighten the headstones. And we'd like to expand the language in that case, and it was left out of the original draft, to also be able to allow for repair and restoration of the headstones too. So, that's the -- as quick as I could do -- the summary of all the sections of the bill. I would just also refer you, within the testimony, I reference that amendment, and also in section one, dealing with the taxing districts, there's an October 1 date in there. It really should be July 1. July 1, '19 is great. If you wanna, do it July 1, 2020 -- because if you have that on October 1, it interferes with
our mandatory reporting cycle. I'd be willing to answer any questions.

SENATOR CASSANO (4TH): Questions from committee members? Madam Chair.

REP. MCCARTHY VAHEY (133RD): Not a question but a comment. Thank you for outlining that so clearly and explaining it very well.

JONATHAN HARRIS: You're welcome. I'm tired already, so -- [laughing] although it was very interesting testimony to hear today. So, thank you.

SENATOR CASSANO (4TH): Well done.

JONATHAN HARRIS: Thank you.


DAVID SUTHERLAND: Thank you very much. My name is David Sutherland. I'm here today on behalf of the Nature Conservancy to thank the committee for raising Bill 1010, HAVING TO DO WITH THE DISCLOSURE OF DAMS TO PERSPECTIVE BUYERS OF PROPERTY.

We do a lot of dam removals with our organization, partly to improve fish passage but also to improve public safety. We like to -- we've got a matrix of dams that accomplish ecological purposes but also accomplish public safety purposes to solve problems with roads constantly getting flooded, or other hazards that dams can create. And we are one of the most densely dammed states in the country -- I think
we might be one or two -- we've got more dams per square mile. And unfortunately there's no requirement, if you are selling a property that includes a dam -- there's no requirement that you notify a perspective buyer of that property of that dam, and we've been hearing cases in which people unknowingly become owners of dams with some pretty serious financial implications. We've just -- I included three of those cases, brief descriptions, in my testimony. We're just hearing another case this week of somebody who purchased a home and didn't realize that included ownership of half of a dam, which is not that uncommon -- the ownership of a dam is divided -- and the dam is failing. That owner, the new owner, and the other owner of the half-dam, they wanna remove the dam, but some of the other nearby property owners -- because there's a little pond there -- they're threatening to sue them if they remove the dam. And this buyer had no idea this was what he was getting into when he purchased this property.

And oftentimes, it can be very deceptive visually as to who -- who owns a dam in a neighborhood. Other times, people assume that the state owns all the dams, but the state only owns about 250 to -- I think 250-245 dams. So, most of the dams are privately owned, and we -- there's a couple of different mechanisms in this bill for ensuring disclosure, and we think you need both of those forms. There's no foolproof way of doing it, and we think this approach in the bill would solve that.

We do think there are some language changes that need to be made that are very important that we've
included in our testimony. So, thank you again very much for raising this bill.

SENATOR CASSANO (4TH): So, you're the dam guy, huh?

DAVID SUTHERLAND: The dam guy -- the damn dam disclosure guy, right?

SENATOR CASSANO (4TH): You know, when I saw this bill, I almost had to chuckle. As a mayor for several years, we had, in Manchester, several dams that we never knew about. We knew about the Risley and the bigger dams. I never knew about the costs associated with these dams and the dangers that literally exist in our communities that we don't know about. And, you know, they're kinda hidden because some of these are small earthen dams in somebody's backyard, sitting way back, that nobody ever goes back to, and so, when I saw that, I said, well, they're catching up with the dams. So, glad to hear your testimony, and I didn't realize that you're doing the repairs and so on. Where does the funding come from for the private owners? Is there any funding source? Because a dam that blows is a potential threat to the neighborhood at least.

DAVID SUTHERLAND: No, it's a huge problem, and there is no funding. DEEP gets a little bit of bond money each year, but that's primarily to deal with -- with those 245 or 250 state-owned dams, and they can't really keep up with those that well. So, it can be a big expense. One of the cases I pointed to in the testimony, a buyer became an owner of a dam that needed $150,000 dollars of repairs. The legislature passed a bill about seven or eight years ago that requires now private land owners that own
dams to get those dams inspected. It's between every two years to every ten years, depending on the classification of the dam. And depending on the dam, just an inspection can be $2,500 dollars or so. So, even that is an expense even if the dam's in pretty decent shape, but it's a big problem. We -- again, we do -- we probably do three dam removals a year, and we scrape together a little bit of federal money. We try to get some, you know, grant money. We raise donations, but it -- and sometimes the land owner will put in some of it, but it's -- a dam removal can be -- I think some of ours are generally between $70,000 to $80,000, which oftentimes is cheaper than repairing them, and that's part of why that can happen.

SENATOR CASSANO (4TH): Representative Dubitsky.

REP. DUBITSKY (47TH): Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Thanks for coming in. One of the things that I've seen a lot in my area is dams that are -- I don't know if you'd call them natural, but they have kinda formed over time, probably with some beaver activity and maybe on -- you know, along a sturdy stone wall with a stream going through it, and you know, it starts building up and suddenly you've got a fairly significant pond behind it. Does this affect that?

DAVID SUTHERLAND: Hmm, I'm trying to remember the definition of dam in the regulations. Dams aren't really defined in the statues, but they're defined in the regulations. I think it has to be -- I'll get back to you on that, but I think there has to be some manmade component to it, I believe. I don't think if it's primarily natural that it -- that it would be a liability on the -- on the land owner.
REP. DUBITSKY (47TH): Okay, so --

DAVID SUTHERLAND: But I'll get back to you on that.

REP. DUBITSKY (47TH): Okay, I'd appreciate it. Thank you.

DAVID SUTHERLAND: That's a good question.

REP. DUBITSKY (47TH): Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

SENATOR CASSANO (4TH): Senator Champagne.

SENATOR CHAMPAGNE (35TH): Thank you. Thank you for coming in today. I just had a question. Does any of the language, the new language that is put forward, does it require the municipalities to do anything?

DAVID SUTHERLAND: The putting it on the land records, that would be the -- the provision in there in the first section that would [reading]-- the owner would be responsible for putting it on, but that would involve a little bit of work on the town's part to actually enter it onto the town records.

SENATOR CHAMPAGNE (35TH): Oh, just entering it in?

DAVID SUTHERLAND: Yeah.

SENATOR CHAMPAGNE (35TH): But the town doesn't have a responsibility to go out and look at this dam? The town doesn't have -- isn't required to map 'em or any unfunded mandates?
DAVID SUTHERLAND: Okay. That's all I had. Thank you.

SENATOR CASSANO (4TH): Any other questions? David, thank you very much.

DAVID SUTHERLAND: Thank you.

SENATOR CASSANO (4TH): The variety of things that come before this committee makes the committee plans. [Laughing] Jennifer Lineaweaver. Kyle Wallace and Harry Clark next.

JENNIFER LINEAWEAVER: Good afternoon.

SENATOR CASSANO (4TH): Good afternoon.

JENNIFER LINEAWEAVER: My name is Jennifer Lineaweaver. I’m the Assistant Assessor for the town of Groton ["Speak into the mic, Jennifer" in background] as well as the Co-Chair for the Legislative Committee of the Connecticut Association of Assessing Officers. I'm here today to express CAAO's support for Senate Bill 1012. We did already submit written testimony, so I'll try to not take up too much of your time.

Contingency fee assessment appeals is a booming business here in Connecticut. They have encouraged frivolous lawsuits that are not based on values throughout the state. There is an expectation that these tax reps will be successful in obtaining some reduction in tax court due to the volume of lawsuits. Assessors routinely receive requests from these tax reps for their Grand Lists, so that they can do mass mailings, and as a result the tax courts
are really flooded with these types of appeals, and municipalities don't have the financial ability to defend them. So, they're often forced to settle.

I'd like to make a point. It's not just about the legal fees for the municipalities. Every time that these -- that there is a settlement reached in tax court, it causes a reduction in the Grand List every year, and that reduction shifts the tax burden onto all the other tax payers. We feel that Senate Bill 1012, as written, it does address the majority of the problem. However, it does include a carve out for CPAs. CAAO requests that the language be amended to remove this exception. As written, a tax rep could simply join hands with a CPA, and these types of contingency appeals could continue to exist. Our fear is that this is a loophole that could be taken advantage of. We do stand with CCM in support of just removing these types of appeals completely. So, thank you for the opportunity to testify. I'd be happy to answer any questions that you might have.

SENATOR CASSANO (4TH): Any questions? Madam Chair.

REP. MCCARTHY VAHEY (133RD): Thank you, Mr. Chair, and thanks to both of you for being here. You probably heard me ask earlier, and I realize you're probably the better person to ask the question -- how many communities are experiencing this, and just what kind of volume are you seeing with this?

JENNIFER LINEAWEAVER: Yes, well, like I said, assessor's offices across the state after reevals are getting these requests, and there's mass mailings going out to all the taxpayers with the
promise that they can achieve some type of tax reduction for them. I can speak to Groton's experience. I don't have statewide numbers in terms of -- but I think -- I think that we'd be hard-pressed to find a municipality that hasn't had some type of appeal.

JOHN CHAPONIS: If I may add a little bit --

REP. MCCARTHY VAHEY (133RD): If you can just identify yourself.

JOHN CHAPONIS: That'd be great, sure. John Chaponis from the town of Colchester. One of the problems is, if an appraiser takes a tax appeal, they're held to a higher standard. They're not allowed to work on a contingency fee because if you're doing an appraisal for someone you know, or you have a personal interest in it, then you're biased. Some of these tax rep firms come from as far as Missouri. They're from out of state. They're not licensed appraisers in the state of Connecticut. They [inaudible-04:46:43] our Grand List at reeval time. They send out a letter to, you know, your top couple of hundred taxpayers -- I'll appeal your taxes for free, it will cost you nothing, I'll take 50 percent of the reduction over the period of five years. The municipality can't possibly afford, when they're flooded with all these court cases, to try all these cases because there's a great expense there, and many times we're forced to offer a reduction that's paid for with public funds, taxpayer dollars, simply just to, you know, keep moving it through the system.
We also get our arm twisted a little bit in courts, where the judges are trying to, you know, move 99 percent of the appeals through without having a trial. So, you're gettin' it from every side. Many times they don't come in with anything other than something they drew up that morning on a -- on their pad. They don't come in with an appraisal. Sometimes they've never visited the property. They file the appeals not even knowing if it's overvalued. So, we believe that this bill, if the carve out is removed for CPAs, is something that would help address the problem.

REP. MCCARTHY VAHEY (133RD): Thank you. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

SENATOR CASSANO (4TH): Are there any other questions? Let me just comment that this bill has been before us before. We have people doin' appraisals that live on the other side of the Mississippi River and have never even been east of it, and they're making -- negotiating for appraisals. And they're not fools. The look at the Grand List. They look at the mall areas. They look at the large manufacturing companies and so on. They focus on the big ones, where they can make some money, and it becomes a game. Unfortunately, it ties up our assessor's offices across the state. The cost to us -- it's almost one of these things, they force you into a position of I surrender, and that's why this bill's before us because it's an unfair bill to the people who live here and work here. So, I appreciate you comin' and testifyin' on this. Thank you.

JOHN CHAPONIS: Thank you very much.

KYLE WALLACE: Good afternoon. Thank you for taking the time to hear my support of HB 7206. My name is Kyle Wallace. I work for Vivint Solar. We are a residential solar installer here in Connecticut since 2015. We employ roughly 80 folks here out of our North Haven warehouse and have done installations across the state.

We support the bill because it clarifies an issue that has been rising over the last couple of years with unequal treatment between two -- which could be the two identical solar systems on two neighbors houses, and we think that's -- that's not the intent of the existing legislation. We think it's clear, and so we definitely support that. It's vital to have a business environment that is stable. That, you know, these exemptions you can rely on, so that the benefits can be fully realized by the industry. And to just put a little -- some of the real world costs of what has been happening -- our company has paid nearly $500,000 in property taxes over the last two years, which we believe are incorrectly assessed, and we expect another couple of hundred thousand for the 2018 year. And so, these are -- they're real large amounts, and they really do affect the project economics of solar and potentially -- right now it's only affecting a portion of our -- all of our installations, but if it were to grow, it would be extremely damaging, even more than it already is.
And we, as Mr. Farnen said earlier, we have not passed these costs on to customers because we don't really have a contractual way to do that, nor would we want to do that because we believe these are in error and will stop at some point. And if we were to do that, then to pass it through for new customers, that would essentially eliminate any savings they would see on their utility bill from solar, and so they likely would not choose to install solar.

So, this is a real -- a real impact to businesses, and we just really wanna stress that it was the initial legislative intent to cover all residential systems. There's nothing different from a third-party owned system and a customer-owned system in terms of how it interacts with the grid, how electricity is produced and supplied to homeowners. In both cases, they are exactly the same. The utility bill credits those customers see are exactly the same. In both cases, they'll be making payments -- one might be for a loan, and one might be to the third-party owner. There is nothing that would justify a difference in tax treatment of these systems. So, with that, I will stop and take any questions.

SENATOR CASSANO (4TH): I'll start with one for ya. It's interestin' this morning, I think I heard two or three comparisons in finance with Massachusetts about this and New York about this. What is different about what we're doin' here from surrounding states or Northeast states, particularly where solar really can make a difference?
KYLE WALLACE: With the property tax piece? I mean, there's over 30 states that have property tax exemptions for residential solar, and so Massachusetts and Rhode Island and other states, they don't -- do not assess property taxes on residential systems. And so, this is out of step, and it is right now only a small number of municipalities. And so, this has been a pretty common way across the nation to help incentivize renewable energy for homeowners.

SENATOR CASSANO (4TH): And in Connecticut, the incentive is a local option.

KYLE WALLACE: Sorry, what was that?

SENATOR CASSANO (4TH): And you're sayin', here in Connecticut, it's a local municipal option as to whether they wanna tax it or not.

KYLE WALLACE: The current law is -- we believe that it applied to every municipality. It wasn't a choice on their part, and so that's where we believe that the towns are incorrectly assessing them under the current statute. The current statute is fairly clear that all residential systems should be exempt.

SENATOR CASSANO (4TH): All right. Good. But it's not clear is it? I mean, I'm assuming it's clear, but if we got this issue, then it's not clear. Okay. Thank you. Madam Chair.

REP. MCCARTHY VAHEY (133RD): Thank you, Mr. Chair, and thank you, Mr. Wallace, for being here with us today. And I just wanted to follow up on a couple of things. You said that two different neighbors
who have the same system could be treated differently. Could you explain that a little bit -- why that would be?

KYLE WALLACE: Yeah, so the difference would be even if they were the exact same system and all of their attributes on two different roofs, and one the customer has bought outright with cash or had financed through a loan, they would not -- they're currently not being assessed property tax by these towns. Now, if the neighbor with that exact same system went through a third-party ownership model, where they -- they pay power payments essentially to the third-party provider but still receive all the same benefits from the solar as the customer-owned system, that system is being assessed property tax. And so, that's where the difference is, and it's purely a matter of -- of the -- a different ownership structure of the system.

REP. MCCARTHY VAHEY (133RD): So, essentially the neighbors -- neither of the neighbors are paying the tax. In the first case, those who own a system, they're not being taxed. But in the second case, the same system is on the roof, we'll assume, most likely, and the neighbor isn't being paid a tax, but you as a company are paying a tax.

KYLE WALLACE: Yes, that's -- that's being paid by us, and if this were to spread and just without clarification, that would eventually have to get passed on to the customer as well because the project economics wouldn't work. I mean, we're talking, for an average system, probably around $400 dollars in the first year, declining slightly over time. So, it's a pretty significant amount that if
we were to pass that through to a customer, that --
that could virtually be all of their savings in a
year, so.

REP. MCCARTHY VAHEY (133RD): So, so far, you have
not been passing this cost on to customers. You, as
a company, have been basically eating that cost, but
you have said -- I think I heard you say -- that
essentially that's not a sustainable economic model
for you going forward.

KYLE WALLACE: Yes, I mean, when we installed these
systems going back to 2015, we believed they would
be exempt, so it was not built into pricing, our
cost model, our project economics, any of that. And
so, to be hit with the tax assessments now, there's
nothing really we can do. The systems are already
on the roof. The contracts are already -- have been
executed. So, there's really not much we can do on
those projects. For new projects, we could -- we
could pass it on, if nothing were to change and we
continued to be assessed like we currently are.

REP. MCCARTHY VAHEY (133RD): So, and you
referenced, if you did pass that cost on to the
consumer, then the consumer's average savings would
be greatly diminished.

KYLE WALLACE: Yes.

REP. MCCARTHY VAHEY (133RD): So, and you also
referenced that you think the language is clear, but
as the Senator pointed out, we're -- partly we're
here because there is -- seems to be some lack of
clarity or specificity, as I'm learning from the
lawyers there seems to be a legal difference between
those words. I would just note, I have a solar installation on the top of my house that is owned, and enjoy that, and absolutely am very much an environmentally conscious person, but there's no question that I'm like every other person -- economics must and does play a part in those decision making pieces. And I know, as we -- as I mentioned with Brian Farnen earlier -- as we look coming from coastal community, but we're seeing impacts all over our state in lots of different ways. We know that we need to keep moving towards renewable. So, there will come a time, I hope, that we will not have these kinds of exemptions for systems like this because it will be the norm.

So, I know that, you know, there's a question still as to when -- are we there now, when will we get there? But, at least at this point in time, I think it is important for us to clarify. Thanks for being here today, and thank you, Mr. Chair.

SENATOR CASSANO (4TH): Thank you very much.

KYLE WALLACE: Thank you.


HARRY CLARK: Distinguished members of the committee. I'm Harry Clark, and I live in Wilton, Connecticut. I'm here today to express my wholehearted opposition to HB 7319, AN ACT CONCERNING FISCAL INDEPENDENCE OF SCHOOL DISTRICTS.

Students in Connecticut, by and large, receive an educational experience that is ranked among the best
in the United States, and it's a direct result of strong local participation and debate, which some pejoratively refer to as arguing. Local oversight, administration, and funding means that each of Connecticut's 169 towns and cities can tailor the curriculum, staffing, and capital expenses of its school district to its unique needs in the context of a town's overall budgetary picture. Disconnecting school taxes from the municipalities overall budget removes an important control over costs. As a previous commenter noted, different parties will no longer need to compromise. I would speculate that taxes would increase as a result of that.

In my small town, I can sit across the table from elected officials and fellow citizens who serve on the various boards of zoning, finance, and education. I can voice my concerns as a parent and my concerns as a taxpayer and be heard. I can be face-to-face with the people who shape my town's policies and spend my tax dollars. Our line item budget is posted on the town's website. All of my fellow taxpayers can likewise participate. It is as transparent a process that could possibly exist. Yes, we debate. Yes, we compromise.

Under the proposal being debated here, decisions regarding budgets, curriculum, and allocation of resources will be made outside the context of the bigger picture of a town's budget. Yes, the debate goes away, but so does the fiscal restraint and accountability. And I believe that if and when forced regionalization happens, these decisions will take place far away, made by the political class rather than the actual citizens affected. I humbly
disagree with this approach. Sometimes, smaller is more efficient. It's certainly more fair to the individual citizen due to the ability to participate. If saving money is the goal of this, efficiency and procurement is already happening via partnerships like the Capitol Regional Purchasing Council, and there are a lot of other opportunities across neighboring towns on a voluntary basis.

Disconnecting school budgets from town budgets is a bad idea. It's an additional layer of bureaucracy with less accountability. Is it any wonder that local property taxes are higher in New York, the example cited by the earlier speaker in favor of this bill, than in Connecticut. I'm open to any suggestion that involves neighboring towns and cities working voluntarily and cooperatively to make the education experience better for all students and less expensive for all taxpayers, and the best fit is gonna vary by municipality.

This one-size-fits-all approach is a solution looking for a problem. Justifying it be saying lots of other states do it is not a valid argument. I humbly ask you to refrain from adopting SB 7319, and I'll take any questions that you might have. Sorry, I'm not a public speaker, so I read my statement. I apologize. [Ringing/laughing]


REP. ZAWISTOWSKI (61ST): Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I just have one question. I’m looking at your
testimony online. I can't figure out quite where you're from.

HARRY CLARK: Oh, Wilton.

REP. ZAWISTOWSKI (61ST): From Wilton.

HARRY CLARK: Yeah.

REP. ZAWISTOWSKI (61ST): Okay, 'cause you mentioned the Capitol Region for --

HARRY CLARK: I had -- somebody pointed me towards that, and that's largely a Hartford-centric association, but I saw our town on the list. I'm not exactly sure what they -- how they participate, but it seems -- it seems like a great organization, and it seems like a great idea.

REP. ZAWISTOWSKI (61ST): It's one of those things that works.

HARRY CLARK: Yeah, absolutely, yeah.

REP. ZAWISTOWSKI (61ST): Thank you very much for coming in today. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

HARRY CLARK: Thank you. I appreciate it.

SENATOR CASSANO (4TH): Representative Dubitsky.

REP. DUBITSKY (47TH): Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and thank you for coming in. I, too, represent a lot of small towns that are in a situation very similar to what you have just described. The bill, as it's written, seems to apply only to us -- only to the
small towns. I'm tryin' to find out why. Do you have any idea?

HARRY CLARK: Well, I would actually posit that it applies to almost every single Connecticut municipality with the exception of six very large cities, or large for Connecticut. I have no idea why. I can -- I have a sneaking suspicion that this is directly involved with the three bills that we debated a couple of weeks ago about forced regionalization of schools. If you're gonna have regional schools, how can you fund it without a regional taxing authority? And that's my biggest fear is I'll no longer be able to sit across a desk from my fellow townspeople and ask them -- do we really need new carpeting in the high school this year, or can we wait one more year -- that's never gonna happen on a regional level.

REP. DUBITSKY (47TH): So, it's your feeling that if this were imposed, and each school district had its own taxing authority, and then there was regionalization, then the regional district would have individual taxing authority in each town.

HARRY CLARK: Yes, and it disconnecting it from the municipal budget means that well-run towns with a very low mill rate, two-thirds of their budget or whatever would normally go to the school system will now be subject to a much higher mill rate decided by people far away, without taking anybody into consideration.

REP. DUBITSKY (47TH): Okay. Well, thank you very much. I appreciate your testimony.
HARRY CLARK: Thank you. I appreciate the opportunity.

REP. DUBITSKY (47TH): Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

SENATOR CASSANO (4TH): Representative -- my Chair.

REP. MCCARTHY VAHEY (133RD): Thank you, Mr. Chair, and thanks for waiting here with us today. I know it's been a long day, and it's a lot of time, so I appreciate you taking the time to be up here. I think you may have heard myself and Representative Lavielle earlier, and I think one of my questions is -- and maybe I'll be a little more clear in phrasing it to you -- is the idea that you talked about being able to sit across from your local representatives and to really have them -- you see them in the grocery store, right?

HARRY CLARK: Sure, sure. Principals' coffees, you know, direct access to the superintendent, and we can talk about these things. Sure.

REP. MCCARTHY VAHEY (133RD): Right. And, as I noted previously, I have many concerns with this bill, but one of, you know, my arguments isn't necessarily that direct access because, as I see it, this separate taxing authority would still be accountable to me as a voter, and I would still need to be, you know, seeing them in the grocery store or at the Principal's coffee, etc. And I think there are a lot of very valid other points, but that's one that -- I'm wondering if you can respond to that -- that why it would be less responsive.
HARRY CLARK: Oh, I think it's just my -- sorry -- I think it's my general assumption that this is part of the regionalization plan. That it's not necessarily so Wilton can now have two separate budgets, it's that we have our municipal budget -- police, fire, EMS, whatever -- and then 60 percent of what formerly went into the big pot now goes somewhere else. That's not -- it seems -- I'm not a lawyer, I'm not a legislator, but the bill seems so vaguely worded you can't really divine what the ultimate, you know, intent is.

REP. MCCARTHY VAHEY (133RD): So -- and I appreciate that. I don't have the same assumption, but maybe I can take this opportunity to express some process that might help shed some light. The bill was originally proposed as a proposed bill in the Education Committee by a single legislator. We all put in bills, and proposed language is not statutory language. It was then referred to this committee passed the deadline for the proposed bill date. Because of that, this committee agreed to hear the bill, which required that it then be drafted into statutory language. So, a lot of different -- I'm, as a new Chair this year learning all the different pathways that happen with bills -- and so, that is a fair point, that there's a lot of questions there in terms of what's written into this statutory language. And, I think, there are -- there have been, I know, may conversations around the state as to why this bill is coming.

One thing I will note that the first speaker today -- I don't know if you were here -- Speaker Sharkey, previously when he was Speaker, at one point had put forward a bill that would require simply that the
tax bills themselves separate out how much money was spent on the board of ed side and how much on the town side. And I can recall, as a newer legislator at the time, there was much consternation then, even in terms of separating that out. So, I will not --

HARRY CLARK: Interesting. I'm all for transparency personally, but I can see how some people may not want that.

REP. MCCARTHY VAHEY (133RD): Yes, so I don't assume intent with this bill, and I -- but I understand why people have that question and concern.

HARRY CLARK: I also appreciated some of the other speakers talking about two silos. Now you have the grandparents versus the parents. And I -- I bought that house in Wilton a long time ago, when I was a bachelor. I paid years of property tax without having kids, but I was still thrilled to help the school budget. And I assume, as an older person, I will still be thrilled to fund the budget, so it doesn't have to be parents versus grandparents, and I think this might create that.

REP. MCCARTHY VAHEY (133RD): I agree with that, but I will also acknowledge that, as I think I said earlier, I sat on the board of selectmen, had previously been on the RTM. And I have knocked on the doors in my community over many years, and I hear that kind of tension in our current system. Right? ["Sure, sure" in background] There's always that -- that, again, balance of where we're investing in terms of our town and board of ed budget. So, I think whatever system we have, we
will probably be having those conversations either way.

HARRY CLARK: Agreed.

REP. MCCARTHY VAHEY (133RD): But thank you so much for being here today.

HARRY CLARK: I appreciate it. Thank you.

REP. MCCARTHY VAHEY (133RD): Mr. Chair.

SENATOR CASSANO (4TH): Any other comments? I do wanna comment. I appreciate your testimony.

HARRY CLARK: Thank you.

SENATOR CASSANO (4TH): This is kind of an interesting process, particularly over the last eight or ten years. You've mentioned regionalism, and regionalism now is a bad word. Ten years ago, we were lookin' at regionalism as a way to help municipalities save money, but we maybe have gone -- and I've been Chair of CRCOG, I've been Chair of the National Council of Regents, so I get it -- but I also understand the concerns that go with it. One of the bills we passed last year, as an example, was to allow a change of statute that required that every municipality must have a school superintendent. It really put a fiscal burden on small towns, and so, since then, a lot of towns have merged their school [inaudible-05:09:27] only got one superintendent for two towns and 10,000 people or somethin' like that. That makes a lot of sense. But there's a point where you can go too far in regulations.
You mentioned the six cities. The six cities are regions in themselves. Think about it, they have their wealthy areas and the poorest of areas. They have their business areas. They have the commercial areas. I mean, they have -- they are regions, whether we like it or not. By every definition of the word, they are regions.

I like to talk about shared services. It's probably the best approach, and one of the things that I think the bill was tryin' to get at is the sharing of services. But you have to respect ownership while you're sharing the services, and that's where bills like this coming forward sometimes, they need to be tweaked. A lot of them are designed to generate the communication we're havin' today, and that communication leads to the creation of maybe solutions, and so that's the plus side. If somebody -- you know, I can look at that agenda and be like, oh, we're gonna be here all night lookin' at some of these, and we know that, but if something positive comes out of the process -- you coming up, as an example, from Wilton to testify is a message to me of how important this is. And so, that's where the process works. And so, I appreciate you comin'.

HARRY CLARK: And I'd just like to say, I've been sitting here for ten hours or something. [Laughing] I'm very impressed with the amount of debate that goes on. I'm very heartened by everybody being here and asking intelligent questions across some crazy broad range of topics. That people have come up here -- it's very -- it really makes me feel good. It reinforced my belief in government. [Laughing]
SENATOR CASSANO (4TH): You said about an hour ago. The beauty of this committee is we get everything. [Laughing]

HARRY CLARK: Thank you.


STEPHEN LASSITER: Good afternoon, distinguished members of the committee. Thanks for the opportunity to testify today. My name is Stephen Lassiter. I represent a company called Sunrun. We're a solar company here in Connecticut, and I'm testifying on HB 7206, the solar property tax bill before you.

Sunrun is the largest residential solar storage and energy services company in the country and has helped Connecticut residents go solar since 2015. Our office and warehouse is on Brainard Road here in Hartford, and our employees and our customers live across the state.

When Sunrun was founded in 2007, we pioneered something called the solar-as-a-service model, which has expanded access to solar energy to hundreds of thousands of Americans who would not otherwise be able to afford it. In addition to selling systems outright, we also provide the solar-as-a-service model, where we own and maintain the system for our customers, and they essentially purchase the electricity that it produces, typically at a discounted rate from what they would otherwise be paying for electricity from the utility. This
third-party ownership model has expanded solar access to thousands of Connecticut residents who would not have been able to afford it otherwise, and, in addition, it is the reason why the majority of solar homeowners in Connecticut are actually below the median income level. Connecticut is one of two states in the country where the majority of folks who have gone solar are below the median income level. So that's -- that's a wonderful achievement for the state.

Sunrun is proud to be one of only a few installers that also participates in a program with the Connecticut Green Bank that specifically serves low and moderate income homeowners. A complex -- as you all know, a complex and delicate balance of policies at the federal, state, and local levels has allowed Connecticut to achieve the levels of solar deployment that it has to date, and one of the key components of that delicate balance has been the property tax exemption for renewable energy systems.

As has been discussed earlier in testimony, this is a common and popular policy across more than 30 states. Connecticut enacted its property tax exemption for renewable energy systems in 2007 and expanded it in 2013. The bill we're discussing today, of course, we did not initially view it as necessary. We thought the existing property tax exemption was clear. However, some municipalities, of course, have challenged certain types of solar energy systems' eligibility under that -- under the exemption, both on the grounds of third-party ownership and also in terms of them participating in the state's net metering program. This assessment position ultimately means Connecticut residents who
could not afford the upfront costs of a solar energy system by purchasing outright with cash could pay additionally. [Ringing] And, just to wrap up, of course we, you know -- we have concerns about disparate impacts on folks who wanna go solar in the state, just in terms of the type of ownership model, whether they own it outright or whether they buy the electricity the system produces. In the interest of time, I'll stop there, and I'm happy to answer any questions.

SENATOR CASSANO (4TH): Let me just throw one at ya. What would you change in that bill that would keep solar available to those families that we're talking about.

STEPHEN LASSITER: In the bill before us today?

SENATOR CASSANO (4TH): Right.

STEPHEN LASSITER: I think it's -- we support the bill. I think it helps clarify any possible ambiguity or questions that certain folks may have about the existing exemption. So, we are -- we are in full support.

SENATOR CASSANO (4TH): And we need to get that message, you're sayin', to our assessors, who have a different view. [Crosstalk]

STEPHEN LASSITER: There's a -- you know, obviously, there's a small handful of folks who challenge the existing exemption, and I think this bill before you today would help clarify the legislature's original intent.
SENATOR CASSANO (4TH): Okay. Other questions? Thank you very much.

STEPHEN LASSITER: Thank you.


KATHY FLAHERTY: Good afternoon or good evening, Senator Cassano, Representative McCarthy Vahey, and distinguished members of the Planning and Development Committee. My name is Kathy Flaherty. I'm the Executive Director of the Connecticut Legal Rights Project, and I'm gonna use about 30 seconds to testify against 7318 and join my colleagues in legal aid and the other housing advocates. I'm a step removed from doin' the direct work for clients, but the reality is is that towns don't budget for relocating tenants when they do the code enforcement. But I've had to represent tenants in the past to fight with towns to get that money, and towns have the ability to recoup that money from the landlords who aren't keepin' the properties up to code. So, I don't really think we need a task force. I urge you to just kill the bill and move on.

But the reason I'm really here today is I'm gonna turn this around because I'm here for myself. I'm here in support of SB 972, AN ACT CONCERNING ACCESS TO ORIGINAL BIRTH RECORDS BY ADULT ADOPTED PERSONS, because I am an adult adopted person who cannot get my original birth certificate. I have friends who have been able to do it because they were adopted in other states. You know some people had to do it. But I was born at a time where I actually did have
the right to that birth certificate, and it was taken away in 1975, when I was eight. My parents certainly didn't know.

And I know a lot of people in this building are very sad today. Forty-five is way too young to lose somebody to a heart attack. I lost my brother at 33. He would've been 49 this year, but he died 16 years ago. We were both adopted. We did not know his health history, and my parents didn't know my mental health history. And I really think if they did, some of the struggles I had, I might not have had. But if you read my testimony, I really object to some of the things that the folks from Catholic Charities said, especially because of the way they treated me personally -- sending me a letter on my birthday that my mother didn't want -- my birth mother didn't want contact. They could've sent that letter a week later, a week before, and it's dated on my birthday.

Please, change the law. Give us a right to have that document. I'm not gonna go out of my way to contact somebody who's made it pretty clear for the 51 years I've been on this planet that she doesn't want anything to do with me. I can live with that, but I have the right to have a document from my government that's actually the truth. Thank you.

SENATOR CASSANO (4TH): Thank you. Questions or comments? Madam Chair.

REP. MCCARTHY VAHEY (133RD): Thank you, Mr. Chair. Thank you, Kathy, for being here with us and for sharing that very powerful testimony. And I can't imagine the kind of pain on so many levels -- and
clearly with different circumstances in that situation that you just mentioned in terms of the communication. I wanna thank you for emphasizing something that was also said earlier, which even though I have been supportive of this issue for a number of years, I've not quite put a fine point on the fact that this was a right that you once had and is now no longer a right -- and you were a child, and you were too young to be able to know, to be able to access -- and that your parents didn't know as well. So, I wanna thank you for taking the time to be with us and for the courage to share your experience.

KATHY FLAHERTY: Thank you.

SENATOR CASSANO (4TH): Senator Champagne, then Representative Delnicki.

SENATOR CHAMPAGNE (35TH): I'm just gonna make a comment. You know, listening to you guys today, I agree with you. I think you do have a right to it, especially because it was taken away from you. And I hope this passes -- and good luck.

KATHY FLAHERTY: Thank you.

SENATOR CASSANO (4TH): Thank you. Representative Delnicki.

REP. DELNICKI (14TH): Thank you, Mr. Chair, and thank you for coming forward with your testimony. Just a real simple question. You see this as literally a civil rights issue because that was awarded to us at one point in time.
KATHY FLAHERTY: Absolutely, and you know I just -- thank you for giving me the opportunity to answer the question because working a lot with these blue ribbons for Keep the Promise Coalition, completely separate issue, but so much of the justification for keeping the law in its current form is that these promises were supposedly made to birth mothers when they relinquished their children. And the reality is is that those promises should never have been made because it wasn't the state of the law, and this state should really not be in the business of keeping promises that were never legitimate promises to begin with. So, you know, it absolutely is a civil right. Everybody else -- I spelled it out in my testimony. If I were born prior to January 1, 1944, I could get my original birth certificate. If I were born between January 1, '44, and October 1, '83, and my birth parents were dead, I could get my birth certificate. But, if I don't know who they are, how do I know if they're dead? So, I just leave you with that. And, if I were born and adopted after October 1, 1983, I could get my original birth certificate. The state of the law right now is completely arbitrary, completely capricious, and this state should change it to treat everyone equally.

REP. DELNICKI (14TH): Thank you for coming forward, and I suspect you may have heard my testimony earlier.

KATHY FLAHERTY: I did. Thank you.

REP. DELNICKI (14TH): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

SENATOR CASSANO (4TH): Representative Dubitsky.
REP. DUBITSKY (47TH): I'm still confused as to why there is this gap. There's these few dates -- these two dates -- between those dates you can't get your birth certificate. Before you can, after you can -- why is this law here?

KATHY FLAHERTY: I have theories, but I don't know if it's actually true. I think Karen Caffrey, when she testified earlier, said that Desiree Stephens spells all the versions of the law out in their testimony. If you look at the timeframe, I think there are reasons. I mean, the law was clear. There was access up until '75. For some reason, in 1975, the law was changed without a public hearing. Well, there was a Supreme Court decision in '72, which I think changed some choices that people were making as to whether they terminated pregnancies or gave birth and gave the children up for adoption. But there were whole decades where young women were pressured to relinquish their kids, and I have no doubt that part of the reason -- I mean, for me, I am thankful.

I was born in '67. My birth mother was 18. You know, abortion was not legal in 1967, but her mother was institutionalized in a mental hospital. Her father had already died of cirrhosis. She was a freshman in college, and she was living with her older brother. This is all the non-identifying information that I have. She took a break from school, gave birth to me, went back to school and apparently did really well. So, if there's anything I inherited, it was the ability to do well in school, so I'm grateful for that.
But, you know, I think if you look at society at the time, it was just very different. So, I don't really know how or why it changed in '75, but the reason why the bill has the '83 date in it is because when DCF revises its forms every year, literally the first form we could find that said very specifically your adult child that your -- you know, may be able to find you when they're an adult was the revision that was the revision that was dated October 1 of '83, so that's why that part of it is there. The 1944 one, I have no clue. Karen might know, but I don't.

REP. DUBITSKY (47TH): Okay. Thank you. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

SENATOR CASSANO (4TH): Any questions? Thank you.

KATHY FLAHERTY: Thank you.


REP. MCCARTHY VAHEY (133RD): [Background talking] Yes, turn on your microphone and push the button. There you go.

JACK QINGYU TANG: Yes, important, first of all, English is not my first language, but I tried to -- and this has a lot of contents -- content here. Last night, I slept probably between 25 to 45 minutes to write this, and I tried to fit it into three minutes and I still failed. My kids tried to time it and said, "Daddy you're hopeless, you just used up four minutes." I guess, okay, maybe
miracles happen, and I still get to speak because last time I tried to do this I went two minutes, then I was shut down. I reached out for a conversation, I was shut down -- hopefully, not here because -- and also, to give you a heads up, initially I was writing like scathing content, attack type of thing, but after looking at you guys, you're not the type -- my audience. But I'm probably still a little bit strong. Don't take it personal. And also, I tried to write a professional testimony, but in the end, it looks like, always ending up like high school student's history class speech, but -- so, take that into that and see if you can get it because -- and I have an accent. Young man, can you start the clock? Thanks.

SENATOR CASSANO (4TH): I'll give you a little time.

JACK QINGYU TANG: Honorable members of the Planning and Development Committee. My name is Jack Qingyu Tang. I am a private citizen, a husband and a father from Wilton, Connecticut. Today I testify with my strongest opposition to HB 7319 and all other attempts to create any new taxing districts without the people's consent nor representation for:

"We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty, and the pursuit of Happiness.—That to secure these rights, Governments are instituted among Men, deriving their just powers from consent of the governed." -- The Declaration of Independence, July 4, 1776.
With duplicate, expensive, and opaque new taxing authorities that circumvent the checks and the balances from the towns and their people, this bill represents modern day "taxation without representation" as well as shameless power grabs by the big cities from the small towns. Both of which are gravely unjust and utterly immoral. Any critical thinking individual could and should recognize this bill as the financial companion bill to the other three forced school regionalization bills, namely SB 738, 457, 874, which had already provoked the largest popular revolt in Connecticut in about 28 years, since the introduction of the state income tax in 1991, and which also practically destroyed people's trust in the majority party of this legislature, especially upon the painful but clear revelation of the class warfare nature of these bills after Education Committee Chairman and Senator McCrory's famous "Elephant in the Room" speech during the March 1st public hearing.

Perhaps supporters of any of these four bills still want to use majority party votes to force it down the throats of the people, or sneak it in through some other crafty maneuvers. Yet, the people are already fully awakened and vigilantly watching.

The grassroots resistance group, hashtag Hands Off Our Schools on Facebook has grown to nearly 10,000 members in just a month-and-a-half, where people from all walks of life and political persuasions, Democrats and Republican, are totally fired up, united, and determined to fight this marathon fight, especially to organize the votes and defeat any radical candidate that had unleashed or supported
this cruel class warfare upon people's beloved towns, schools, families, and kids.

Yet, the current grave situation still makes my heart very heavy. Without a higher common belief, vision, and wisdom, I believe the end result still may ultimately be the most tragic, lose-lose, that is mutually assured destruction.

A house divided against itself cannot stand. A state or nation divided against itself cannot stand either. So, members of this committee, rise above yourselves and kill this bill. Stop this rapidly escalating civil war between the social classes, the big cities and the small towns, the government and the governed. Follow the true leadership example of President Abraham Lincoln instead of the chieftains of tribal class warfare. Let us fight not each other, but resist the temptation from our common enemy, which is that energy and the specter of hatred among men. Let us usher in the true reconciliation and the reconstruction among men who believe in and cherish their shared humanity, so that we can fight together our real problems in our state, like government overspending, pension underfunding, and the poverty and achievement gaps, etc., etc.

Finally, let us defend levity and common sense for all the people and turn Connecticut away from this darkest dystopia of class warfare and tyranny and into the brightest beacon of freedom, opportunity, and prosperity for the whole nation. Thank you, and may God bless the repentant America. "Rabbit Jack from Wilton, CT," that's my pen name. Thanks very much. [Laughing] Thank you for the grace time.
SENATOR CASSANO (4TH): You did that in 45 minutes?

JACK QINGYU TANG: I don't know. Yeah, but my kids think it's impossible. I think you showed grace. I appreciate that.

SENATOR CASSANO (4TH): Very well done.

JACK QINGYU TANG: Any questions?

SENATOR CASSANO (4TH): Questions or comments?

Madam Co-Chair.

REP. MCCARTHY VAHEY (133RD): Thank you for being up here today, and I do appreciate the disclaimer at the beginning, certainly.

JACK QINGYU TANG: Yeah, otherwise, you would think I'm crazy. [Laughing] I may be still.

REP. MCCARTHY VAHEY (133RD): No -- well, aren't we all? We're all here, so.

JACK QINGYU TANG: Yeah, okay. Thank you for that human touch -- connection.

REP. MCCARTHY VAHEY (133RD): So, I think that what I've experienced in the past few weeks with a number of the bills is that there is a lot of emotion that we all have and a lot of feelings. We have assumptions. We have facts. We have all kinds of things. And one of the things that I value very much about this committee is the opportunity to have conversations in ways that we're able to hear one another, and I think that's -- for me today, that's
been what has happened here, and it certainly has been my experience. I'm new to this committee, but it's been my experience in working with the members here.

This bill is not going to be going forward. I can't speak for the other members but as a Co-Chair of this committee, but I've valued the conversation that we've had here today and the ideas that I've heard expressed, as Senator Cassano said. And I do think that the thing that we all share -- the things that we all share and the values we share, that's what I choose to focus on. And as someone -- you heard me earlier, I was a child welfare social worker. I'm a mom of three kids, who have been in our neighborhood public schools that I value tremendously and have been a very important part of the fabric of our lives and of the community's life. What I hope is that we can find ways to make sure that every child in this state can have the kind of amazing experiences that my children have been very fortunate enough to have, and that we do address some of the things that you talked about. ["Right" in background]

My colleagues know I talk a lot about pensions, for example. All of these issues are the things that we have to really target together. And as much as we are able to have these conversations and to learn from one another and our experiences, which as you've heard today are very different around the state, I think it's a value. So, thank you for taking the time to be here today.

JACK QINGYU TANG: May I also take the chance to respond to that? Because today is totally out of my
expectations because -- since -- I mean, this journey is like unbelievable since January -- you know, early January when this bill came out. It's like epic -- the history, drama like unfolding in real time. And the average day is like history in the making, and I just don't have time to write it out. But one day I'll write it out -- the journey of my heart. And some of the -- I have another article called, "The Love Story for our Beautiful Little American Town of Wilton," which takes about 3.5 minutes, but I won't do it here. [Laughing] But I don't wanna make you guys cry because my wife cried, and my kids cried, and a lot of people were inspired. They went down to fight just because of a single article, and I was totally shocked. I couldn't -- I don't think that come from me.

But this thing -- I wanna respond today why I think it's so amazing. Right now, I have to go back to talk [inaudible-05:34:20] here. Miracles did happen. In the beginning, I don't even expect anything because I know last time what -- so many people testified. Hundreds of people made -- you know, spent five or six weeks to collect objective facts and to prove these bills are not good for them -- that don't make sense. But if all this wind song, it hit a brick wall. Then I realized -- yeah, there's no -- no real conversation. Why? Then I see this thing called -- it's like hardened etiology. People already -- that etiology tramples human reason and hurts humanity. So, that's why. So, I did not have high expectations coming in.

So, I just wanted today -- and my goal was, I planned to just speak the truth in love. And truth will be quite a severe truth, and my love is fairly
I have to speak. It's like burning fire -- have to come out. That's why I loathe those -- loathe those things. And I told the Chairman, both of you, I looked it up -- I looked it up. You were Democrats, so I thought okay. I wouldn't have very -- I thought you guys were all the same -- just always shut down because I'm from the other side, so to speak. But you're so different, so human, and I -- [laughing] sorry. It's like, earlier, what's her name -- the ladies here. You guys listening to these people, so I know this is different. So, I just realized I had, you know -- I had -- I didn't picture this. It's so overwhelming, and I -- I don't know what else to say. Thank you.

REP. MCCARTHY VAHEY (133RD): So, I thank you for this conversation because today has been a very difficult day emotionally ["Oh, yeah" in background] for many of us here. We lost a friend and a colleague. And I don't know if you were here earlier when we had the song, "Seasons of Love," and I appreciate you saying that because I think I'm -- as a social worker, part of what I talk about is what happens in our brain, you know, when we begin to have [background coughing] the fight or flight responses. And our brain, the neurobiology is now amazing and the research we have, and our ability to have the conversation changes when we go into those fight or flight modes. ["Exactly" in background] But when we're able to engage in conversations like this, it helps us to learn and to understand.

I do think we are going to back here next week as a committee, [background coughing] probably having some more difficult conversations about some of the
same issues that were in the Education Committee previously, but I hope that we can have that conversation constructively. I think that there are very valid points that people bring to the table, and what I've learned here as a rep is that my experience is different than Senator Cassano's, than Representative Zawistowski's, than Senator Champagne's, than Representative Delnicki's, and that's part of what we try and do here is -- unfortunately, when we create state laws, they usually are one-size-fits-all because we're creating a state law. And we do our best to balance our needs. But I think that it's -- what you said is so powerful because every one of us here, whether members of the public or elected officials, we are all human beings. And I think especially being the mama bear, as I sometimes say, we want what's best for our children so badly, and everyone wants that -- everyone wants what's best for their children so badly, and sometimes we get stuck in the conversations that way.

So, I can't thank you enough for this kind of honest conversation. We don't usually have these kinds of conversations.

JACK QINGYU TANG: Oh, you guys opened shop for me to have that chance. Last time I tried, I was shot down, but you guys made a difference.

Also, before I go, I wanna emphasize this. I think it's shared humanity. That was some theory. I was talking to people, and you guys are confirmation actually today -- giving me the first confirmation that it is something we should believe in because otherwise we are all engaged in tribal warfare.
It's not just in Connecticut, it's nationwide, and we don't have a solution. And if you don't believe this higher value, then you never have a solution. You are just locked into that tribal warfare, class warfare, whatever warfare. You can never lie about that, so you have to believe something you haven't seen yet. And I believe that, and you guys just delivered that today for me. I mean this is a first -- a small miracle I saw today. And you said -- and coming into this, I said, I have no expectations. I already told the people, 10,000 people over there. Right? I said -- I actually said to myself, I haven't told them yet -- but I said whatever this kind of fight, we go into this like going to a barbeque party.

We do not be afraid, but we do not expect immediate results because we know that our party -- the majority party is probably on the other side of our -- our, you know, wishes, right? So, I said, okay, even though we've got nothing, we still need to go because you're will is here to be unyielding. Otherwise, you lose the war already. You lose the fight already. So, I just prepared to lose every single battle until 2020 election. So, but today, you already gave me a first small sweet victory -- some promise -- some hope, okay. There may not be many different already. So, and that's because of human connection making here. Thank you very much. I really thank you -- appreciate the time.


SENATOR CASSANO (4TH): Senator Champagne.

SENATOR CHAMPAGNE (35TH): Thank you for coming in today. I didn't like this bill from the beginning, and I'm hoping that with everybody that's talked so far, and I know we've got a couple more that, you know, we can help convince and hopefully get rid of this bill. But, you know, when you finished, I had to stop myself from clapping. So, good job. I want you to pay attention to the rest of 'em, 'cause I may need ya to come up for a couple more, okay?

JACK QINGYU TANG: Yeah, yeah. I will use my vacation. I'll take those days off, and I'll come here. [Laughing]

SENATOR CHAMPAGNE (35TH): Thank you.

JACK QINGYU TANG: Thank you, guys.


JOHN SUGGS: I'm John Suggs, and in the few minutes I have with you, I need to let you know who I am and why I'm saying what I'm saying. I need you to know that I am a born and raised Catholic. I am a devout Catholic, and I'm a proud Catholic. And I spent five years in my 20s training and studying to become a Jesuit priest, and so it is with a heavy heart that I come before you today and that I read the testimony that has been submitted to you from Catholic Charities because it is a falsehood. And that's what I wanna talk to you about, and why I wished Catholic Charities had come here themselves so that I could speak to them directly. I am not an anti-Catholic. I respect what Catholic Charities
does. I am a proud member of the Catholic Church, but the testimony is false.

What they wrote to you and submitted in their testimony was Catholic Charities understands the intent of the proposed bill for SB 972 -- I apologize for not saying that -- however, there are already existing processes in place for an adult adoptee to reunify with his or her biological parents as well as obtaining a medical history. Agencies like Catholic Charities have been able to facilitate the search process for adult adoptees when adoptions are closed. That is the testimony of the head of Catholic Charities.

My lived experience is just the opposite. I am a genetic genealogist. I use DNA to help adult adoptees through DNA find their birth families. One of the persons that I've worked with went to Catholic Charities, not once but twice. Both times paid their fees to ask them to find her birth mother and to ask her if she would be open to reunification. On both occasions, Catholic Charities came back and told her they could not find her mother. Thank God, she came to me because, through DNA, I found her mother, and she was living less than five miles from Catholic Charities' office -- less than five miles, and they looked twice over a period of years and they couldn't find her.

And thank God that I was able to find her and unify them because they had the most amazing reunification. They would text each other every single day. Every night, one or the other would call the other to say good night. It was amazing to watch, but just 13 months after I found her, the
birth mother passed. So, her daughter had her every day for 13 months. She would never had known her at all if she accepted Catholic Charities' false assurances -- 'cause it is a falsity of what they've submitted in this testimony. They are giving you false assurances that they can handle it, they are the experts, they know what to do and they know how to do it. The reality is, [ringing] the system is broken. They aren't doing what they're even saying they're going to do, and it is impacting people's lives. Five miles away they couldn't find a birth mother. Thank you. Please support SB 972.

SENATOR CASSANO (4TH): Questions or comments? No? Madam Chair.

REP. MCCARTHY VAHEY (133RD): Thank you, Mr. Chair, and I just wanna say thank you also for staying and for having the courage to share your story with us. Thank you.

JOHN SUGGS: Thank you.

SENATOR CASSANO (4TH): Terrie Woods. Then Shelley White, Sally Harold, Katy Roy. (Katie had to leave?)

REP. WOOD (141ST): Thank you, Chairmen McCarthy Vahey, Cassano, and Ranking Members Zawistowski and Champagne. My name is Terrie Wood. I'm State Representative for the 141st district, which is Norwalk and Darien. I'm here reading testimony that has been submitted by First Selectman Jayme Stevenson of Darien and Board of Finance Chair Jon Zagrodzky, also of Darien, and multiple other members of our town leadership committees.
On House Bill 7319, AN ACT CONCERNING FISCAL INDEPENDENCE OF OUR SCHOOL DISTRICTS, the undersigned town officials from Darien strongly oppose House Bill 7319, AN ACT CONCERNING FISCAL INDEPENDENCE OF SCHOOL DISTRICTS, which has been referred to the Planning -- Committee on Planning and Development.

Darien's town charter provides a structure of government that controls the appropriation of funds and authorization of bonding for both town services and our school system. This structure includes a board of finance, elected at large, and a representative town meeting elected by district, both of which are independent of the boards responsible for the operation of town services and our schools. This structure adds extra oversight to spending-borrowing decisions, providing valuable checks and balances to the budget, an appropriation process that yielded a productive relationship among these entities, which improves decision making and enhances taxpayer confidence.

House Bill 7319 changes this fundamentally. Under the bill, the board of education assumes exclusive authority over its budget with no independent oversight. In addition, the board of ed takes on responsibilities that include capital spending and bonding as well as tax collection -- again, with no oversight or additional involvement from other elected town bodies. Residents would essentially face two separate governments operating without the collaboration and shared expertise that has served Darien well up to this point.
In addition to divided government, this bill would drive duplication of roles and responsibilities at the board of ed, which would be forced to retain separate personnel with expertise in capital spending, bonding, and tax collection. Board of ed members would inevitably need to allocate time and resources away from the educational initiatives in order to focus on financing, reporting, tax collection, accounting, and maintenance of cash reserves, and interaction with the credit rating agencies, all previously the purview of other town entities -- what a waste.

Longer term, we see a bigger purpose behind this bill, which is to set the stage for consolidation of school taxing authority at a broader regional level or even the state level. Last time we checked, the real crisis in this state was unfunded retiree liabilities. House Bill 7319 does nothing to address these problems, but instead creates new ones -- fear, distrust, waste, inefficiency, and the prospect of real damage to top-performing school districts in Connecticut without any improvement to those districts who are underperforming.

Worse still, our state's relative attractiveness versus our neighbor's will continue to decline, and we are likely to see an acceleration of outmigration of key taxpayers to places like Florida. We hope you will consider opposing this legislation. Thank you. I'm happy to answer any questions.

SENATOR CASSANO (4TH): Representative Zawistowski.

REP. ZAWISTOWSKI (61ST): Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Thank you for coming in, sneaking out of Finance.
I'm sure -- good to be in a different room. Anyway, a lot of what was in the testimony, we have heard from a lot of other people today, but what is your personal perspective as far as what you think is the most egregious part of this legislation?

REP. WOOD (141ST): Definitely the regionalization aspect of it because all of a sudden you've got an amorphous group that doesn't have the community -- the grassroots community support, and you lose the engagement. What I have heard from school districts that are regional school districts is the parents are not as engaged as the parents in the smaller towns and smaller school districts.

REP. ZAWISTOWSKI (61ST): I'm not entirely certain that this is just restricted to regional -- regional school districts. The way it's written right now, it would even include your local school district. But, you know, it all depends on what happens with other -- other things going on. But I appreciate your coming in, and if there's anything else, we'll --

REP. WOOD (141ST): I just wanna be clear, I was just giving the example of the regional school districts. As I understand it now, they don't have the parent engagement as strongly as some of the single-district school districts.

REP. ZAWISTOWSKI (61ST): It's interesting because we talked to people from a couple of regional districts here today, and there were a couple of different permutations. One of them just for like the high school level, where they had a local board of ed for elementary and -- elementary schools, and
then a larger one for the regional. And then there's other ones that they combine the whole district, so it's an interesting -- interesting thing. But, no, I really appreciate you coming in and discussing this. There are some very valid concerns that have come up today, including in your testimony. Thank you.

REP. WOOD (141ST): Thank you.

SENATOR CASSANO (4TH): Other comments? Representative Wood, I just -- one comment. There are some -- there's a difference between a bill that might require as opposed to communities getting together on a regional basis, which has been done successfully, not only with education but with a whole variety of things, and I don't wanna lose track of that. And I -- I'm concerned that because of some of the proposed bills that have been before us, and the fear that for many it's created, that some of the positive things we've done collectively to try and do the sharing of services are being jeopardized now because of that fear. And it's -- there are some places where they share services well, where school districts have worked together on a great basis, and so on, and I hope we don't lose that message because of, you know, some of the numbers that were thrown out, and we have population numbers, different sizes, and things like that. They're proposals. We know they float, and people float proposals, but nothing like that is gonna come out of this committee, for sure. And so, I just hope we don’t lose some of the gains that we've made in getting people to share those services.

REP. WOOD (141ST): Agreed.
SENATOR CASSANO (4TH): Thank you. Anyone else? Thank you very much for comin' back.

REP. WOOD (141ST): Thank you all.

SENATOR CASSANO (4TH): Is Finance still goin'?  

REP. WOOD (141ST): Oh, yeah, so I'm going back up. [Laughing]


JILL LAGUTTATA: Mr. Chair, Representatives, and Senator -- no-- so, Chair and Representatives. My name is Jill LaGuttata. I'm from New Canaan. I'm here to oppose 7319 -- HB 7319 -- for many reasons, chief among them is the fact that this provides a monetary infrastructure for forced regionalization. There are no cost savings here. Towns aren't clamoring for the state to legislate divorce from their board of education. This bill is about forcing towns to radically transform their governing structures to some other end. As we look to attract business leaders to Connecticut, our state should promote our towns and the uniquely intimate relationship they have with their schools as what differentiates us. We should be proud of our historic and quintessentially New England forms of local government, where young and old decide priorities together. This relationship is why Connecticut ranks fifth in the country for schools and why people choose to locate here.
Earlier we heard testimony about New York. Low property taxes are a clear competitive advantage we still have over Westchester, and they're why many families choose the long commute from Connecticut instead of living much closer. In addition to possibly driving up property taxes by setting boards of education at cross purposes with towns on budgetary matters, the bill mandates cost increases by forcing duplication of significant financial services and then doubles down by making it illegal for towns to raise money for schools. If we play out the forced regionalization, the layers of bureaucracy multiply. So, boards of education select a member, or they pay a representative, who then sits on a separate regional committee, which then is its own educational services taxing district and has to create that whole infrastructure and is in charge of taxing and appropriating funds across town lines. The hope of controlling spending and having a voice in our schools just gets more and more remote.

I strongly oppose HB 7319 and any other bill that paves the way for regionalization or forces a town to separate from its schools. As so many have said during the hearing on the three forced regionalization bills, Senate Bill 738, 457, and 874, dismantling what works is not the way. Thank you.

SENATOR CASSANO (4TH): Thank you. Questions?

REP. MCCARTHY VAHEY (133RD): Thank you. I'll add my thanks for staying with us on a Friday especially. I appreciate that. And I think one of things that -- as I reflect on this bill and I know
other bills have been brought up, but this hearing today is about this bill, in particular -- I think that what's helpful for me, as I mentioned earlier, is the beneficiary as a parent of students in a school system that has served them so well. And, as you noted, being fifth in the country is something to be incredibly proud of. But from my house, I can walk to Bridgeport, and it's not the -- the students there are not the beneficiary in the same way. I don't think that the bill before us today would address that. I think there are a lot of other important conversations that we need to have, and that we do have in this building, about that, but I just most of all wanted to say thank you for spending your time here with us and for adding to the conversation. I appreciate it.

JILL LAGUTTATA: Thank you. I agree that it would be helpful if the conversations were frank and open and not veiled in -- in different pieces of legislation that don't accomplish what they're trying to -- what I think the real ends are.

SENATOR CASSANO (4TH): Thank you. Anyone else? I wanna thank you for testifying and, you know, if we could focus on bringing up the other 100-120 towns, whatever it is, that are -- that are a level below, and the levels obviously deepen if we go farther down. I remember seeing 169 with that -- that level of excellence. That should be the goal, and hopefully that's the direction we're going. So, thank you. Anyone else?

JILL LAGUTTATA: Thank you.
SENATOR CASSANO (4TH): Karen. Karen Quesnel? Chris -- I don't see Chris VanDeHoef -- and then Raphael.

KAREN QUESNEL: Good evening. Thank you so much. My name is Karen Quesnel, and I am so happy to be here tonight in support of SB 972. I feel very passionate about this. I'm a birth mother, and I am reunited with my son after 35 and a half years. It's been almost two years now. And although this isn't about reunion, and really my support of this isn't about reunion necessarily. Reunion brought to me an awareness about some of the -- the things I had never thought about and the things that -- his lived experience never -- never occurred to me. [Background coughing] And one of those things was not being able to get his original birth certificate -- even in reunion with me, even with my so-called permission, he still can't access that. And I was appalled and shocked -- I didn't know. You know, I -- I was a teenager. You know, I was 18, and I spent some time at St. Agnes Home for unwed mothers. I relinquished him through Catholic Family Services at the time, and, you know, it wasn't something I wanted to do.

But, I do remember that meeting -- feeling like I had no choice, but you know, I had a social worker with me, and I had an attorney there -- oh no, not my attorney. I had no representation, but there was an attorney there. And there was no promise of confidentiality, but you know, I didn't want confidentiality. I didn't want it, period. But, I -- I just felt like I, you know, I needed to kind of make that statement and set that right -- that that
wasn't an expectation of mine. And I always hoped that someday, you know, he could find me.

When we reunited, and I looked into what it would take, you know, I really was -- really was surprised. We actually -- we, you know, together went through that process of trying to do that, and I -- and I just find it so amazing that here's an adult who doesn't have the same rights I do, and I just don't understand. I just don't understand. [Ringing] So, I know as a birth mother even, you know, we have rights, and we can say what we want. And, you know, with DNA, you know, we've heard today there's a lot of other -- other things that -- that make this really so unnecessary. So, I -- you know, thank you all for those that have supported this, and I ask for your continued support to help -- help make this happen. Let this be the year for him and for all adult adoptees in Connecticut. Thank you.

SENATOR CASSANO (4TH): Thank you for sharing with us. Appreciate it.

KAREN QUESNEL: Thank you. I appreciate the opportunity.

SENATOR CASSANO (4TH): Representative Delnicki.

REP. DELNICKI (14TH): Yes, just a brief comment here. You brought a totally different perspective to the issue than we've heard as a birth mother, and I think that's really very important to have that here also because it adds that other dimension that we haven't really heard effectively. ["Yeah" in background] I guess it's safe to say that you believe it's actually a civil right.
KAREN QUESNEL: Absolutely. I wrote it in my written testimony that I really felt it was such discrimination. I just couldn't believe -- I didn't realize. There's so much I didn't realize about the aftermath, you know, then you -- and just, you know, some of the -- the issues about not having, you know, medical history and things like that. But that, in particular, I was really -- I was really stunned by that, and it's offensive -- it's offensive to me, and it's, you know -- it's important. So, I do. I do feel that is a civil right. We -- I mean the law, I believe, should be applied equally to all of us, and I don't understand why it's not so.

REP. DELNICKI (14TH): Well, I thank you for coming and testifying. And I didn't realize you were a South Windsor High, Class of '80.

KAREN QUESNEL: Yes, I am.

REP. DELNICKI (14TH): Hey, I had to give a shout out for South Windsor High -- what can I tell ya. Thank you. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

KAREN QUESNEL: Thank you.


RAPHAEL PODOLSKY: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. My name is Raphael Podolsky. I'm a lawyer with Connecticut Legal Services, which is part of the legal aid programs. I feel a little bit anti-climatic for me
to be testifying now, but I’m here in regard to House Bill 7318, which deals with the Relocation Assistance Act, in opposition to the proposed bill.

You've heard testimony from a number of other people, and there are really just a few comments that I wanna make to add on to it. In regard to why we oppose the bill -- and that would also include the proposed JFS version that was attached to Sharkey's testimony -- is that it tries to make this artificial distinction between temporary and permanent dislocations. And the reality is at the time somebody is displaced, no one really knows unless, I mean, unless they say the building is gone, like a fire -- nobody knows how long, whether it's temporary or permanent -- nobody knows how many days you need to get relocated. These are things -- it just doesn't work, administratively or as a way of classifying people. We very much believe that all the people who are displaced need to be treated as a group, as they -- they have the same rights in terms of what benefits they can get.

The second thing I wanted to comment on was one area though that I do agree with Mr. Sharkey very much is, he talked about himself, the way in which towns -- many towns, certainly not all towns, but many towns have resisted complying with the statute. And that's been our experience, and I just thought it was interesting that he acknowledged that actually was his experience as well. And he wasn't justifying it, he was explaining it, but it -- it sort of says something about the parameters.

And the third comment I wanted to make has to do with some of the discussion about whether the law is
ambiguous and what's needed. And I would just say this -- there's been a lot of interpretation of the statute. There are regulations from the Department of Housing. There have been appeals in which there have been decisions made by administrative officers of the administering agency. There was a major Supreme Court case in the 1980s that really laid out what is and what is not covered by the statute. And my sense is that the real problem here isn't that people can't figure out from reading what's there, what it means, but that people haven't really learned what it is -- so that more than anything else what's needed, I think, is training of town attorneys to get this on their agenda, to get this on their radar screen, and for them to understand what's required because that's a tremendous help to towns when issues arise. Relocation assistance issues have not necessarily arisen in every town. And so, it seems to me, that should be the focus. That doesn't mean that there shouldn't be a task force or that something shouldn't be taken up, but I don't think the law is as ambiguous as it was presented as being. [Ringing] And those are really my only comments on this. I'd be happy to answer any questions I can.

SENATOR CASSANO (4TH): Thank you, Raphael. Questions or comments? Yes, Madam Chair.

REP. MCCARTHY VAHEY (133RD): Thank you, Mr. Chair, and Mr. Podolsky, thank you for hanging in there with us and for being such a steadfast advocate on these issues. You -- you partially answered one of my questions. You've heard me asking other folks here today, if we were to do a task force of some sort, who would you recommend to be around the
table. So, first, if you could confirm, do you think a task force would be helpful? And, if so, who would you recommend to be at the table?

RAPHAEL PODOLSKY: Well, I'll answer both halves of that either way, I guess. Let me start -- if I can start with the second have -- certainly, if you had a task force, I would want people on it who represent people who get displaced, so an organization like ours. I think you would wanna have people, some of whom you heard today, who have represented displaced tenants, and so I think that's a very important impact. I mean, otherwise, I think you've probably identified some of the key entities who are affected by sort of the stakeholders in the process, and so I don't know that I can add to that.

The -- part of -- part of what I'm concerned about is that to the extent that the goal is to clarify and kind of lay out what the system is, that's fine, and if the task force does that -- that's very useful. I do think that some -- that some of the impetus for this bill and the sponsor of the bill has actually been to change what the law is and to -- and to in some cases narrow what rights people have. And if that becomes the mission of the task force, which it could -- which it's possible it could be, then it makes me a little bit nervous because a number of the stakeholders have a very different kind of interest, which is in reducing the cost of it.

So, again, it's not an argument against the task force, but it's something that you should be aware of if you are the entity that might choose to create a task force. I certainly do think that -- I mean, I've had many conversations over -- over the years
with both municipal officials and with landlord representatives and groups of that sort, but you know those really are the stakeholders in this, I think, to a large extent.

I mean there may be -- you know, there may be people say who operate homeless shelters who you might wanna bring in because they deal with the issue of where do people go if they're being displaced. I mean, that's a big, big problem because they often end up in motels that don't have any capacity for cooking, but they've got kids and motels don't have rooms that are big enough, you know, for five person families. They have to -- you know, you've got two of the kids in a different room from where -- where the parent is. I mean, all those kinds of things are dealing with -- particularly with temporary relocations. I'm sorry, I don't know if that helps you any or not.

REP. MCCARTHY VAHEY (133RD): No, it does, and Mr. Chair, through you, one additional question with respect to the education piece, which I thought was interesting, and is this something that you or any other group that you are aware of has engaged at all with the bar association folks?

RAPHAEL PODOLSKY: With the bar assoc --? I'm not sure where the bar association fits in?

REP. MCCARTHY VAHEY (133RD): What you suggested -- that education for town attorneys would be helpful.

RAPHAEL PODOLSKY: Oh, okay. Well, I wasn't thinking that as bar association. I think there is an association of town attorneys, which is not the
Connecticut Bar Association. Okay, I'm sorry, I just didn't understand those --

REP. MCCARTHY VAHEY (133RD): No, and I -- and that's a fair point that you're making.

RAPHAEL PODOLSKY: But in terms of education, I would assume that the people who deal with family homeless shelters would have some insights into the issues of how you deal with the fact that someone who's got kids in the school system ends up -- it could be not necessarily related to the Relocation Assistance Act -- but ends up in a homeless shelter. How do you get the kids to school? What school do you go to? Do you switch schools? Do you stay in the -- presumably you stay in the same school, but you may no longer be living particularly close to the school, so there's transportation issues right off the bat. I mean those are analogous issues. Really, they're the same issues that happen when people are displaced because sometimes a motel may not be anywhere near where they were living. You know, the Berlin Turnpike has a lot of motels. You may end up putting people up there, but they're living -- they're coming from Hartford. How do they get from -- from motel in Newington to the school. So, again, I'm not sure I'm answering your question.

REP. MCCARTHY VAHEY (133RD): Well, I think there's a lot -- a lot to learn with this, and I thank you for your answers today and for being with us. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

SENATOR CASSANO (4TH): One more.
SENATOR CHAMPAGNE (35TH): Thank you for holding out for a sec. What specifically part of this proposed bill do you not like?

RAPHAEL PODOLSKY: Well, the proposed bill -- in a lot of ways, the proposed bill is very different from what the sponsor of the bill said when he talked to the committee. I mean, I think he was kinda moving in a different direction, and I think because he recognizes the difficulties. What the proposed bill does is it tries to identify people who are displaced on a temporary basis from people who are displaced on a permanent basis, and then to give different sets of rights based on that distinction. So, for example, one of the rights that people have is a relocation allowance if they move, which is designed to -- to sort of fill a little bit of the gap that if they end up moving they may end up with higher rent than where they were before. A temporary -- for a temporary that would not apply. He would make sure that did not apply, but because you don't know what's temporary and what's permanent at the time you're being displaced -- people are displaced sometimes on 15-30 minutes' notice. Let's say the city comes, says we order you out, fill a garbage bag with as much stuff and you can carry and go. So, people don't always take their possessions with them. I mean, it's not like a thoughtful move out. It tends to be emergency move outs, and at that time, you don't know, for example, how cooperative the landlord will be. Is the landlord gonna come in and quickly fix whatever was the problem. Is the landlord gonna even be around. We don't know these things. Is this a long-term problem, where the building has been deteriorating for years? So, that's the --
we're against it. We don't think the bill works. You asked me what --

SENATOR CHAMPAGNE (35TH): Okay.

RAPHAEL PODOLSKY: Whatever it is, it needs to be something different from that.

SENATOR CHAMPAGNE (35TH): Okay -- 'cause, you know, I understand what you're saying. I've done this several times, being mayor, and you know, we've gone after the landlord every time, and we've gotten the money back from the landlord every time, which is nice. But, you know, in one of the situations, it was, you know, two days before the evict was over, and somebody had gone upstairs to the vacant apartment, turned all the faucets on, flooding, you know, and called us, you know. If the person creates the situation themselves, where do -- where do we stand on that?

RAPHAEL PODOLSKY: I don't know. I think it's -- I actually think that's a difficult issue because most of these buildings are multifamily.

SENATOR CHAMPAGNE (35TH): Oh, I know.

RAPHAEL PODOLSKY: I mean, you could have a single-family home, but most of the multifamily, so that other people are impacted by it. And sometimes I've -- sometimes people have said, well --

SENATOR CHAMPAGNE (35TH): We're not talkin' about the other people. I'm talkin' about the single person who creates the situation themselves. Where do we stand with that? Because I'm still -- I'm
still good with going after the landlord, taking care of the person, going after the landlord, but are we going after the right person?

RAPHAEL PODOLSKY: Well, I think that -- as I said, I think -- I think that it's complicated in a number of ways. One is it's not always obvious who -- if you're trying to assess fault, first thing is it's time of the displacement. You can't really do a fault assessment at that point. You could do it -- conceivably do it later. You could do it in relation to who should ultimately liable or what benefits somebody should ultimately get. But at the time of the displacement, you need to get everybody out of there and put somewhere, and I don't think you're in a position to go see it. [crosstalk]

SENATOR CHAMPAGNE (35TH): Again, I understand all that. What I'm sayin' is, whoever creates the problem does it for four people, does it on a purposeful nature. We take care of the three families. We take care of the fourth one too. But, when it comes down to it, do we -- do we go after the landlord, or do we go after the person who caused the problem?

RAPHAEL PODOLSKY: Well, normally what would happen, I think, is -- assuming this is a person -- if you're a tenant --

SENATOR CHAMPAGNE (35TH): Let's say we can prove the whole thing.

RAPHAEL PODOLSKY: Well, no, if you're a tenant, and you damage the landlord's property, you're liable to the landlord. Nothing changes with that. If you
had gone against the landlord, the landlord would certainly -- could certainly go against that person who caused the problem in the first place.

SENATOR CHAMPAGNE (35TH): So, just leave it up to the landlord.

RAPHAEL PODOLSKY: So, the question is -- well, that's the question. The question is, should you -- should you take the landlord out of this, and should you be going directly against -- against the tenant? Part of the problem with that is -- is you have an overlay of trying to get the property back in line. The tenant is much more likely to have no resources to do that. You're not -- so, in terms of getting some sort of immediate result -- for example, the town collecting from the tenant or even the landlord collecting from the tenant -- you don't -- you don't wanna wait with the --

SENATOR CHAMPAGNE (35TH): I just -- you know, I threw that out there because --

RAPHAEL PODOLSKY: It's a legitimate question. I'm sorry, I don't mean to sound like I'm --

SENATOR CHAMPAGNE (35TH): I know what you're sayin', but I threw that out there just as an example because, you know, some of these aren't cut and dry. And, you know, trust me, our first response -- you gotta take care of the people -- you can't just leave 'em out in the middle of nowhere -- and we do. But, the, you know, the situation sometimes has a little bit of a curve ball. And I think when we do come up with whatever language in the end, we have to keep in mind that, you know, some people --
not a lot, I'm talkin' probably a very small number -- have created the situation that has caused this. And we should keep that in mind for whenever we come with, you know, whatever solution in the end because -- but again, we've gotta take care of everybody.

RAPHAEL PODOLSKY: Yeah. I think that's a fair comment, by the way. I'm not disagreeing. I'm not disagreeing.

SENATOR CHAMPAGNE (35TH): That's why I was just throwing that your way. I didn't want to get into a long back and forth, okay?

RAPHAEL PODOLSKY: Yeah, thank you.

SENATOR CHAMPAGNE (35TH): And most towns know what their responsibilities are. They truly do. All right. Thank you.


RAPHAEL PODOLSKY: Thank you very much.

SENATOR CASSANO (4TH): Karen Silverberg. Is Margaret still here?

KAREN SILVERBERG: (Do I have to turn this on to speak, or you can hear me?) Hi. Good evening, Chair, Ranking Members -- yeah, I know, as the public, you always have to wait your turn, which is okay, as you're here and I'm here too, so. My name is Karen Silverberg. I'm from the lovely town of Wilton, Connecticut. I've lived in Connecticut for over 50 years. I grew up in Ridgefield,
Connecticut. I went completely through the school system, went to UConn, then did a professional degree and moved back here with my husband from Westchester County when my children were ready for school. My children have gone through the public school system and attend public universities in other states.

I think -- well, first of all, I'm here to raise my opposition to Raised Bill SB -- I mean, excuse me, SB 7319. The reason I am in opposition to SB 7319 is because I think the state needs to take a long view on our finances and educational results. Over the last 20 years that I've been in Connecticut, I've been fortunate to have my children in a great school district. As a 50-year -- almost 50-year resident of Connecticut, I'm not proud of what -- what we've been doing with the cities and the inequities that are inherent in the cities, but personally I think that it's not my fault -- it's the state's fault. I don't think that I'm personally responsible for what's happening in the cities, and I think as a taxpayer and a resident of Wilton, I've tried my best to contribute -- to financially contribute to the state in order for them to have the funds to fix the problem. And I think there are some problems in the cities that we need to fix. The small suburbs that are succeeding do succeed because of our population size and also our commitment to education, and I don't know how we're gonna fix that in the cities. But I do know that this bill does not fix the inequities, and I do not think that forced regionalization fixes inequities either.
This bill says that the purpose is to require local and regional school districts of certain size to become taxing authorities that are separate from any municipality for the provision of educational services. It doesn't state a reason for the size. Why 15,000? It doesn't state why they have to separate from municipalities. Why just for towns of 15,000 -- why not in the major cities? If small size works for us -- our boards of eds are, you know, small -- why can't it work in the cities? Cities might be the problem. Why would we be focusing on a certain size for provision of educational services? Again, I don't understand the purpose of these bills.

And I'd just like to give my personal statement since there's not many people left. [Laughing] So, it's a very complicated process -- funding of state schools -- from the research that I have done over the last couple weeks, when regionalization bills came forward, specifically SB 738, the Governor's budget bill, and 457. A lot of these bills that wanted to achieve regionalization came from sources and focused on regions that the representative did not come from. So, there was a bill that was put forth by Senator Duff, who's from our district, that wouldn't affect his district. There was a bill put forward by Senator Looney, 738, that wouldn't affect his district. It would only affect our district.

I really believe that this bill, 7319, is a companion bill to the Governor's budget bill that deals with forced regionalization and also with SB 738. They couldn't exist without this bill, and especially in our town, which our town, Wilton, is pretty unique. We are -- we're on the little -- the
little elbow of Connecticut, so we are against New York for a large portion of our state. We're also a town that has 90 percent of our property within the watershed, which limits the geography -- so, what I'm saying is each town is unique. Our town is unique, and I think that this bill is specifically aimed as us to -- excuse me, I'll just say this -- I think it's aimed at us, and its true intent is to allow small cities to urbanize, specifically Norwalk, while making their neighbors -- Wilton, a successful ring suburb -- pay the bill through final regionalization of boards of ed. They're gonna separate the municipal -- municipal budgets from the board of ed budgets, and then we're gonna probably combine with Norwalk. That's the regionalization plan. And then, we will be paying for Norwalk's decisions without representation through our legislative representatives, and I think separating our board of eds just is a -- is a precursor to our future regionalization with Norwalk, and we would just become a ring -- a ring suburb of Norwalk, if you can understand what I'm saying.

And, Representative McCarthy, you don't see it that way. You said you don't really think that we will become a suburb of Norwalk or incorporated into Norwalk, but I don't see if these two bills went forward, 738 and 7319, that we would not. I think -- it's almost like we're being forced to urbanize through these bills. [Background talking] And -- okay, that's all I'd like to say.

SENATOR CASSANO (4TH): As long as there's no additional testimony coming forward here --

KAREN SILVERBERG: Okay.
SENATOR CASSANO (4TH): I understand where you're from, but it's 6:30, so -- thank you. Questions? Questions? Hold it -- comment. Madam Chair.

REP. MCCARTHY VAHEY (133RD): Thank you, Mr. Chair, and thanks for being here with us today. I just wanna focus on one thing that you said in testimony, which is about whether it's someone is being blamed or fault. And I talk about that a lot in this legislature. It is -- I look at it rather than looking at blame, looking at how we can come to solutions, and how we can address some of the issues that you talked about and others in testimony here today. We are all going to see things differently, and we are all going to assume intent differently based on where we're coming from and what our experiences have been, of course. And thankfully we do because it's what makes us all diverse and unique. But, I -- I just am commenting on that in that I like, rather than to look at the blame piece, to look at the solutions.

But I'll also note that I don't think anyone -- well, I'll speak for myself -- I don't think that what's happening is your fault. That's not something that I would feel comfortable saying. But what I do think about our role here is it's that our responsibility -- it's our responsibility to collectively look at what the right solutions are. And I hear you saying very clearly these are not the right solutions for you, but that's -- that's what we're here to do is to try and listen to what folks are saying and to be responsible to help make sure that we are doing more to help all our students.
KAREN SILVERBERG: And I would agree with that except for -- for the ECS formula. The ECS formula doesn't -- well, sort of singles out towns like ours to pay for towns that are not like ours. We do, through our income tax, fund other districts that don't have the resources that we do, but we are not looked at as helping out. We're looked at as -- I don't know how to say it -- maybe it's because of our experience recently in the Education Committee when we -- when we gave testimony about the bills. I think we were -- we were treated pretty poorly, even though we provide a lot of the funding for inner-city schools. And I think a lot of us felt that people didn't have respect for working people like us, people that work in the private sector every day, had to come up with our own health insurance, that use our houses as sort of a hedge against if we have a medical emergency. We use them for retirement. We don't -- we exist on 401Ks. We don't have pensions. Like, the value of our community really affects how we're going to move forward in the future with our families and our retirement, and I don't think that people understand that -- like the pressure that we're under to pay our property tax because we support our own school fund -- our own school constructions usually -- and also, you know, we fund most of our school employee salaries, etc. That comes all from us. We're very locally funded, but we're not appreciated for that funding.

REP. MCCARTHY VAHEY (133RD): I think what you're saying is absolutely true. The basic nature of how we tried to tax, whether it's property tax -- well, some are more regressive than others -- but taxation, by its nature, is something where we're
pooling our resources and then collectively, with the input of the public here, trying to decide how we share those resources out in the community to the best means and to be the most responsible to the most people that we can.

KAREN SILVERBERG: But I think --

REP. MCCARTHY VAHEY (133RD): If I may finish --

KAREN SILVERBERG: Sure.

REP. MCCARTHY VAHEY (133RD): What you're talking about -- and I know it's late, but these are really important conversations. And I serve on the GAE Committee, and the other night, we had testimony related to our transgender population and whether you can check male, female, or have another option for folks who don't actually conform to those. And what I heard so clearly from the people testifying was that they wanted to be acknowledged, and that they wanted to be understood and heard for who they were. And I'm hearing you say that, but I also heard members of the Education Committee and from other communities here say that as well, and I think that's part of what's so important in this conversation.

Maybe people think it's touchy-feely, but as I said before, I think our brains don't work fully to get to those important solutions, which we're both agreeing are so necessary, when we can acknowledge each other's experiences and understand that we do come from different perspectives, and we come from different places of privilege, as I've talked about here today. I know -- you know, I certainly do, but
that doesn't negate the life struggles and life experiences. So, I appreciate these conversations here today, and I'm hoping that, as we go forward -- because this session is going to continue and we are going to have other conversations, that we can have those conversations in a way that is constructive with one another and also acknowledges and really sees those differences in one another in a way that provides value. So, I'm grateful for the time that you've given here today and for the opportunity to have this conversation.

KAREN SILVERBERG: Thank you.

SENATOR CASSANO (4TH): Thank you very much, especially for staying. Margaret, then Peter. Is Peter still here? ["Right here" in background/crosstalk] You get to wrap up. [Laughing] Two more after that.

MARGARET MINER: Okay, here we go. Are you putting the stopwatch on? Is the clock running? Hi. I'm Margaret Miner. Good evening, Chairman, thank you, and the stalwart members for your thoughtful and emotional rollercoaster day. I'm here to testify. I submitted my testimony -- oh, Margaret Miner, Rivers Alliance of Connecticut -- I submitted testimony.

We are concerned with hydropowered dams being in the same bill as solar and wind getting a property tax exemption. I explained why small residential-scale hydropower is actually particularly problematic, but if it's helpful to you, I could speak to the Green Bank people and see if there's any adjustment we could agree on in the language. This is not the first time that hydropower hasn't fit in well with
provisions for other types of clean energy. So, anyway, I'll make that offer, but we really do not favor more incentives for more small residential-scale dams, which often are not well taken care of even once the facility starts.

Yes, dams should be -- we support disclosure of the existence of dams. Nobody wants to inadvertently own a dam these days. It's a very expensive mistake.

Mainly, I came here to testify on 1013. I gave you quite a bit of the history here in my testimony because this -- this technology has been -- been the focus of controversies in various parts of the state since about 2002. I want to emphasize that we don't oppose the technology, per se. In fact, last year, I perhaps annoyed DEEP by forcefully advocating for using an AT system at Woodridge Lake, where I thought was -- it was a large system, it could be well capitalized, it could be well managed, the money was there, and the space was there if anything went wrong. So, it's a question of where this advanced technology should be used. It's -- the reason it's been problematic, it's been an engine for sprawl, and to add insult to injury, it hasn't really worked very well. Both problems can be cured. By the way, let me apologize, because I noticed the "notwithstanding" language that actually went in two years ago, which to me kind of messed up this bill. So, I had two peaceful years before I noticed that that "notwithstanding" language was part of this statute. The -- what the statute actually does has been the subject of confusion, and I don't think we're quite clear, but it is clear what we want.
In 2008, all the environmental groups and the agencies were in agreement on a bill, which passed, [ringing] became a public act and provided for effective regulation and enforcement so that this technology could be used to an advantage and not misused. Performance is somewhat better, but in 2014, CEQ did another performance evaluation. It's still not where we want it to be. This is not an easy technology to handle correctly, and we hope that we will go back to the place when we were all in agreement. All that happened -- all that we needed was money. The money was pulled out. If we could get some money back or at least get back into that page of agreement -- that place of agreement -- it would be very helpful to the state, I think.

Believe me, my feelings aren't hurt by the lack of questions. [Laughing]

SENATOR CASSANO (4TH): Thank you. Peter.

PETER BALDERSTON: Good evening. Thank you for sticking around. I'll try to keep this as brief as possible. My name is Pete Balderston. I serve on Wilton's Board of Finance since 2016. A lot of people have gone before me to say a lot of the things that I'm gonna say, so I'll just let my testimony stand for itself.

I'm here to testify in opposition to HB 7319. Just a couple of highlight comments. I've -- you know, I've heard a lot of people talk about how tectonic a shift this bill would introduce into school districts that work very well, and I'm here, you know, emphasize that point. I think the thing that
strikes me about this whole process, and by the way, I found this to be very civil, very instructive. This is the first time I've ever testified, and it's been hugely beneficial to my understanding of my state government. But, I will say, that as thin as this bill is -- seven pages -- dealing with something of such magnitude just opens more questions than -- than answers.

There's really very little background information that gives rise to why this bill would be out there. I hold in my hand, for example, something that I pulled off the internet in preparation for coming down here. It is a report from the Hartford Foundation titled, "K-12 Regionalization in Connecticut." It's rich with information, and it has a lot of things that show one way or another what makes sense with respect to regionalization. None of that is a predicate to what was put in the bill. I think you got a lot of people coming up here -- a lot of Wilton people by the way, it must be in the water or something -- with their hair on fire wondering what's going on. And I guess the point I'd like to make is, to the degree there was a thoughtful problem set laid out as to what we're trying to solve for instead of a lot of bills coming in from different directions that really sort of indicate that there's afoot -- something that they were trying to achieve -- it would make for much more constructive and much less confrontational dialogue -- 'cause we need dialogue on something like this.

I think everyone gets we're in a hole right now. Our pension system is a mess. Our cities and their schools are a mess. And we all are in this boat
together, and trying to solve this problem needs to be done together. And when you introduce a bill like this that really has no meat on the bones, it just raises more questions, so -- I guess, I would just say, you know, in Wilton, we have voluntarily done a lot of sharing of services. We have recently completed a sharing of facilities person, a finance CFO between the board of finance and the board of education, and we're unifying our software systems, so that we can see what's happening across the town irrespective of those departments. [Ringing] Those are the kinds of things that people do voluntarily in response to, you know, really tight budgets that we're facing right now.

So, to have something like this, which is so general in nature, be put out there as this might happen to you, it scares the heck out of people. So, I'd like to be a part of the solution to be honest with you. You know, and while I'm on the Republican side of the ledger, again, we're all in this boat together, and I'd like to solve it, you know, together.

I will just say one last thing, and then I'll take questions if there are any. I am meeting with our special ed director next week. She has been heroic in her efforts to try to develop a central utility that would knit together a number of surrounding towns to create a utility that would serve for very interesting special ed needs that are very unique. And if we do it on our own, as Wilton, it's extremely expensive. If we do it before four or five organizations or towns within a 15-mile radius, it could be very cost effective. But the state's reporting and restrictions on doing something like that are almost insurmountable. So, one of the
things I would say is, you know, maybe finding out the kinds of things that would inhibit sharing of services would be a -- of paramount importance here. Those are the kinds of things that help us to solve those problems. That's all I gotta say. I really appreciate you guys sticking around, taking up a part of your weekend. Thank you for listening to what I have to say. I'll take any questions if you have any.

SENATOR CASSANO (4TH): Well, thank you for sticking around as well, Peter. I appreciate your testimony. It's an interesting process in the building. You've got a large House. You have 36 senators. Everyone has ideas and proposals that they would like heard, and so this is the time that they come forward, and they have that right to introduce a bill. We're not necessarily happy sometimes with some of the bills that we have to hear. And some of our bills in another committee are probably not happy with what we might propose, but we all have that opportunity.

Many of those will be weeded out over this next week -- a large majority probably are gonna be weeded out by both Republicans and Democrats working together here. In this committee particularly, we -- we're quite proud of the way we have worked together across the aisle for the benefit of the state of Connecticut. That's what it's all about. But that first couple of weeks, everybody's got that right to introduce a bill. Part of that is almost provocative -- to provoke that kind of conversation to attract you to deal with an issue or whatever it might be. We all have envy of Fairfield County and the outstanding school system they have. It's tremendous. It's a real asset for the state of
Connecticut. It raises all of our averages in spite of what's happening in our urban areas, where those averages aren't as high, and the income is not as high to provide for it. ["Yep" in background]

It's interesting 'cause one of my towns is Glastonbury. Glastonbury is the highest ranked community outside of Fairfield County education-wise, and I know that people buy a home, move to Glastonbury, and as soon as the last child graduates from high school, they move out. They move there for the education system. There is nothing more important as a parent than providing quality education for your children. Some parents have the opportunities to do that, and others don't.

And so, that's the balancing act up here, along with the whole idea of -- you know, if we don't allow people to get their bills out, at least for a hearing, then -- then we have battles all through. We need to come together. We need to come together across the aisle, and we do on most bills. [Coughing in background] In the committee structure particularly, we tend to come together a lot easier, a lot quicker than we do on the floor -- because those bills become more political, but we try to stay away from that at this level. And so, you still have what's sent to you. And so, you heard much testimony today. We hear what the testimony is, and it's a -- it's a learning experience for us, even though some of us have been here a long time, it's still a learning experience. And so, the best part of it is having people like yourself come up here and stay till 7 o'clock at night and have to drive home for two hours in the traffic because
you're committed to it. That's what makes the process work. So, I'm sorry I went on so long.

PETER BALDERSTON:  Not at all. I appreciate that. Thank you.

SENATOR CASSANO (4TH):  Madam Chair.

REP. MCCARTHY VAHEY (133RD):  I know -- I know it's late, but if you may, I do appreciate your offer to be part of the solution because it will -- it's going to take all of us. And there's no -- no one has a corner on the market. The earlier speaker was talking about parties and this and that. You know, I -- I'm married to a Republican. I'm a Democrat. I certainly value his opinion and perspective, right. It doesn't really matter what party. I think we -- our experiences that we have brought forward today are a lot based on the communities that we're coming from.

So, I really appreciate Senator Cassano's words, but yours as well, and some of those things that you're talking about in terms of the ability to share services, you know, we're gonna be talking more about that here next week -- just to be able to understand what we can best do because those are things that we are -- especially with special ed. I -- I left the Education Committee and now I'm here, so we talk a lot about the increasingly onerous impact of cost and the skyrocketing costs when it comes to special ed and the burden that it's placing, and, of course, we wanna make sure we're taking care of those students and their families. But I just, again, can't emphasize enough that your willingness to be part of the solution -- and also to underscore what Senator Cassano said. You saw
here today the aspect of we call the legislature a family, right?

PETER BALDERSTON: Yeah.

REP. MCCARTHY VAHEY (133RD): And you're part of a family, so you know what it's like living in family life, right? And it's really an apt analogy. The legislative process is like a funnel, and everything comes in at the beginning. And as we funnel down, it is part of that uncomfortable conversation -- I have teenagers, so it's sometimes really uncomfortable -- but it's, I think, helpful to hear from folks like you and understand. That specific example that you gave is a very good one, and those are the kinds of areas where we can drill down and look at what are the steps that we can take. So, thank you.

PETER BALDERSTON: Great. Thanks very much.

SENATOR CASSANO (4TH): Brian. [Background talking]

BRIAN ANDERSON: Good evening, Chairman Cassano, Chairman McCarthy Vahey, and members of the Planning and Development Committee. I admire your resolve. It's been a long day for all of you folks, so I'll be brief.

I'm Brian Anderson. I'm a legislative coordinator for Council for AFSCME, which represents about 30,000 public and private employees. Our union, along with most of the municipal unions in the Connecticut AFL-CIO opposes House Bill 6566, AN ACT PROHIBITING MUNICIPAL EMPLOYEES FROM SERVING ON MUNICIPAL LEGISLATIVE BODIES.
This bill restricts municipal employees from serving on councils or boards of finance, boards of selectmen. We believe that the current system is preferable, and public employees have a right the same as other citizens -- and some would even argue a duty to serve in public office -- and I believe this bill would disenfranchise folks. And I talked with Jack Hennessy, who's a good friend of mine, and this bill is very confusing for both of us 'cause we're used to being on the same side. But I would pose to him that the way to handle this is beat your opponent at the voting booth. Don’t cut him out of the process. Don't block their ability to run. Representing public employees, I can tell you that I don't think my folks have an overwhelming conflict of interest. They're part of a class. They're paid through a contract. The contracts are transparent. They're put up on websites. The towns post 'em. I could go into the comptroller's database and proudly show you if they're a MERS pension or what a hundred-year-old municipal employee gets in pension. It's a very transparent, open system.

You can take this stuff to a point of excess. If you're going to block my members from running in their town, then shouldn't you block people who sell and vend to town government. Shouldn't people who work for insurance companies, phone companies, energy companies who sell to towns be blocked from running just the same way my folks would be.

I just leave you with this. Tom Dunn was one of our public works members who ran for Mayor of Wolcott, and he won. He's been mayor about 10 years. Tom has been endorsed by both major parties. He's
independent. He's been endorsed by both major parties the last two cycles. So arguably the guy's the most popular mayor in the state would be blocked from running for office by this bill. And I know what I speak when I say try to beat your opponent. I've helped run two town committee primaries, which are very rare animals, where we literally had to go out and recruit 80 members of a slate to run against the 80 member incumbent slate. Democracy is a pain in the neck, but it's the best answer we have, and I urge you to defeat this bill and let people run -- even my members, who I know can be challenging at times, but I think are very good folks. Happy to answer any questions.

SENATOR CASSANO (4TH): Brian, it's good to have you back testifying on this bill. You've testified on it before because Jack brings it back on an annual basis. I do remember when he first brought it forward, I believe five members of the -- of the city council in this particular city were also on the city council. When you have your chief attorney that's also on the council and so on -- I mean, there were department heads or leaders making policy for their jobs, and so it was -- it was very distressing. In fact, it's the focus that made Jack run again -- run for the first time.

So, I don't know, I know that the bill's not interpreted to stop you from running for office, but I think the purpose was -- of the bill, and it's never got out of the committee, but the purpose has always been running for office in the city that you work for, and it's limited to the council. It doesn't say you can't run for board of ed because you don't have an impact on that side, or whatever
it might be. So, it was a unique situation -- and Jack is persistent, so he brings it back year after year -- but it's a very unique situation to a one-time maybe three-year moment or something like that that, in fact, has now, as he said today, disappeared. So, that's good.

But he brings the bill back because I don't think he wants your town council to be also making your policy in another meeting or whatever it might be, and so I don't know where the fuzzy area -- it's fuzzy, sure. I don't know what the right answer is because, I agree, everybody should have the right to serve. But, if you're serving on a council, and you have an impact on what they do administratively, and then you're voting as a council member, there's an issue that has to be resolved.

BRIAN ANDERSON: I agree it can be a challenge, but the one thing I can tell you is when public employees run it's usually trumpeted, "Hey, that's a public employee running," so the voters know what they're getting, I would argue, for better or worse. And I always think of our old friend, Senator Tommy Carusello, who used to be the longtime lobbyist for the AFL-CIO, God bless him, who passed away a couple of years ago. Tommy was a fireman in the city of Waterbury, an employee who ran for Mayor of Waterbury. He lost narrowly, and then he was fired for running as a city employee. We changed the law to prevent that. And I always think of the fact that Tommy was defeated by somebody who went to prison when he was mayor, to be succeeded by another person who went to prison when he was mayor, and think that an honest guy like Tommy would've been so much better for Waterbury than those guys that --
that I was happy we changed the law to make sure that things like that couldn't happen to somebody like Tommy, and I don't think we should go back.

REP. MCCARTHY VAHEY (133RD): I just wanna say thank you for being here. Happy St. Patrick's Day this weekend.

BRIAN ANDERSON: Thank you.

REP. MCCARTHY VAHEY (133RD): But also, I think there were a couple lines during this hearing today -- that democracy is a pain in the neck -- boy, that's a good one. I think that's appropriate -- maybe almost as good as we're one of the most densely dammed states in the country from earlier, which made me laugh. But, I hope you have a great weekend. Thank you for being here with us.

BRIAN ANDERSON: Thanks, and I salute all four of you for still being here this late on a Friday. Thank you.

SENATOR CASSANO (4TH): [Background talking] David Giordano?

STEPHEN HUDSPETH: Oh, is someone before me?

SENATOR CASSANO (4TH): No, after you. [Background talking]

STEPHEN HUDSPETH: Oh, oh, after me, really? That doesn't happen.
SENATOR CASSANO (4TH): You were last. [Laughing/crosstalk] Maria Weingarten. [Background talking]

STEPHEN HUDSPETH: Chair -- [Laughing] I'll have to put my hand up. Chair, members of the committee, it's my pleasure to be here. I'm Stephen Hudspeth of Wilton. I'm a 32-year Wilton resident. Two of my children graduated from the Wilton schools in the 1990s. One of them is actually now a principal of Osborn Hill in your district. Ain't that nice? He loves it. It's been a great experience.

What I wanna speak about are really three things. I'm not gonna repeat my testimony that's been submitted and it's been said quite eloquently by many others. Three points I wanna make. First of all, do no harm. You have districts and towns that work really well together, have great symbiotic relationships, and that we ought to be fostering not discouraging. And we have combined CFO functions. We have combined head of building operations functions. We have a lot of town-gown combined functions in Wilton that work really great and that I think would be disrupted by a bill of this sort. That's point one.

Point two, it seems to me that a lot can be achieved by a joint operation, but do it voluntarily. And do it voluntarily in this respect, as Senator you suggested so well -- look at Connecticut General Statute 10-158a, but realize that it doesn't work quite the way it should. And when I've heard talking with our own school superintendent is what Peter -- Peter Balderston mentioned just a bit ago -- that that bill has problems with it and that it
makes it very difficult to do cooperative things among districts. That shouldn't be the case, particularly in the special ed area.

I've read also a statement by Superintendent Seidman of Region 4, who was speaking to the same sort of issue. That the way 158a works right now is not facilitating voluntary consolidation as much as it could. It's a very good piece of legislation, it just needs some help.

My point three is this. I don't view this issue as class warfare. What I see here is a commonality in concern. It goes across consolidation. It goes across the issues presented by the bill I'm addressing here. It goes to the very heard of who we are as a people. I write a column for The Wilton Bulletin, and the ed committee wanted me to share one they asked for. This is the one that appeared yesterday in The Wilton Bulletin, a Hearst publication. The headline is "School Inequality Needs to be Addressed Now," and I respectfully suggest that we put aside bills that talk about mandatory consolidation, that talk about setting up these separate districts -- put that aside, let's deal with the issue that's at the heart of the matter here. Our government, federal and state, for the better part of a century has facilitated the kind of discrimination that has led to discriminatory housing, which is followed by discriminatory education in those areas. We have got to find a solution to it. There are plans, and I've presented some -- there are many plans that can work to do that. It's not necessarily a question of money. It can be a question of organization. Maybe it's smaller districts in larger towns.
There's a lot of ways to think about it, but we can't think about it until we put aside the stalking horses, put aside the things that aren't really the issue, and go to the heart of it. How do we deal honestly with inequity that has existed for a very long time, that is our fault as government participants, but is also our ability to cure. We can do it. There can be a vision here. It can work for the good of all of us. And the solution of it -- that's gonna be an example for our whole country as to how you do it right, and how you don't ignore our history, but you learn about our history and you build a right solution.

To me, that's the answer to this, and I think you all -- with your great, wonderful, cooperative work across party lines and every other way -- you can do it. I'm happy, if I can, to any extent help in that process, but I think there are a lot of people who can help you in that process, and I think they wanna do that. And I think people of conscience and good will will come out and do that with you, and they'll support you in doing it because they know that's what's gonna make our state great, what's gonna keep people in our state, what's gonna attract people to our state, and what's gonna say we're a state that stands for things -- that stands for equity, that stands for doing justice, that tries to turn around the worst of the past and make our future what it can really be -- something to be truly, truly proud of.

REP. MCCARTHY VAHEY (133RD): [Background talking] How did you guess? Thank you, Mr. Chair. I just have to comment that if I were not here with you
tonight, I would be at Osborn Hill Elementary School for a St. Baldrick's event this evening.

STEPHEN HUDSPETH: [Laughing] Do you have a son or daughter there?

REP. MCCARTHY VAHEY (133RD): No, I do not, but they host every year a St. Baldrick's event that's a community event, so it's happening right now.

STEPHEN HUDSPETH: I will let my son know that you would've been there but for my keeping you here.

REP. MCCARTHY VAHEY (133RD): No -- and we're here -- this is our jobs. This is what we are here to do, and it's a privilege to get to do it, but I very much appreciate what you are saying, which is about getting to the heart of some of these conversations, which are probably the harder things to talk about -- the issues around equity and the issues that are part of our history and part of what have led us here today. You're absolutely right. And it's also difficult to get from those broad ideas into the specific pieces of what steps we can take to get there, but I, again, as I've said to so many others, appreciate you taking the time to be here and look forward to meeting your son.

STEPHEN HUDSPETH: Well, thank you, and I appreciate all the thoughtfulness that you've all put into your remarks -- the way you've phrased them, the way you've dealt with some pretty confrontational testimony, but honestly. And they've spoken honestly, and you've spoken honestly back to them, and I think that's, just as you say, the kind of dialogue we must need and that we can be very proud
of and that will yield, I hope and expect, a very good result.

SENATOR CASSANO (4TH): Thank you.

STEPHEN HUDSPETH: You're welcome.

SENATOR CASSANO (4TH): Would you say [inaudible-07:01:30]?

STEPHEN HUDSPETH: Yes, Senator.

SENATOR CASSANO (4TH): [inaudible-07:01:34] You plant the seed. That's what this process is in this building is this is where the seeds are planted, and where they go from here -- some of them sit there and never grow, but if two or three things come out of this that are collectively done, working up, it makes a big, big difference. And if we allow and encourage, however we can, some of our municipalities to do things together -- and they are doing that. They're doing that in a lot of different ways. Several times, many of the residents will talk about special ed. Special ed is probably the most unfunded program in education budgets. It's a federal program, created by the federal government, passed on to the states with a massive promise of support that has never gotten it over 20 percent, and it's supposed to be 60 percent, I believe, if I recall the legislation -- or something like that. And so, we have picked up the tab. And a student can be -- when I was mayor, I had a student who was $150,000 dollars a year, and that was 15 years ago. Those things happen, depending on the strength of the disability. I had a brother that was disabled who was born with spina
bifida, so I can tell ya, I know -- I know the effort you have to put in, and I know you guys have a great program down there. And so, it's one of those things that, you know -- that goes beyond the testimony, goes beyond today. It's a beginning, and you know, a lot of those seeds will grow. A lot of them will be back here next year tryin' to get the next batch through, but that's -- it's an ongoing process, so --

STEPHEN HUDSPETH: Senator, if I --

SENATOR CASSANO (4TH): People like you are gonna have to keep comin' up here to testify and that's how we get it done.

STEPHEN HUDSPETH: But, if I may, just on that one for a minute -- because that regionalization that was being described, the voluntary regionalization of special ed that Wilton's part of, that would save a huge amount of money. We don't have to ship people out to Minnesota to some special facility. We can do a lot of that ourselves if we get together to do it together. Facilitating that under 158a would be fantastic -- really -- and have huge benefits, both for the students involved and for the financial results for everybody. It's efficient as well as effective. I wanna say --

SENATOR CASSANO (4TH): Very effective. And I will tell you this -- again, going back to those days as mayor, we had ten elementary schools with ten special ed programs. We wanted to have two major special ed centers that really focused on their needs, and we could afford to do a much better job with two centers, but we were told that's illegal
and discriminatory. It had to be within your own school district. And so, we continue to operate with ten special ed districts.

STEPHEN HUDSPETH: That's the problem.

SENATOR CASSANO (4TH): Who is the loser in that case?

STEPHEN HUDSPETH: Yeah --

SENATOR CASSANO (4TH): So, here's a chance of trying to do good, where the good didn't work.

STEPHEN HUDSPETH: That's exactly it. And let me just say in closing, thank you so much. I really, as some of the earlier speakers said -- seeing this legislative process at work, seeing the heart and thought you put into this, the caring that you have, and hearing all the ideas that are expressed has been tremendously revelatory. These last two sessions, the one two weeks ago with ed and now here with you all has been enormously instructive as to how much is learned in these hearings and how patient you all are to listen to us all, but how effective it is in the end result. So, thank you for that.

SENATOR CASSANO (4TH): Thank you. Okay, David Giordano. David left, I think. Reverend Holloway. John Chaponis is gone. Maria -- is still here?

REVEREND ERNESTINE HOLLOWAY: She's right there.

SENATOR CASSANO (4TH): I see her back there.
REVEREND ERNESTINE HOLLOWAY: Me and her are about the only two that's not from Wilton. [Laughing] I'll behave now. [Laughing] Good evening.

SENATOR CASSANO (4TH): Good evening.

REVEREND ERNESTINE HOLLOWAY: I'm Reverend Ernesteine Holloway. I represent the inner city, and I wanna tell you how unhappy I am. To the Chairman, Chairwoman, members of this board, I'm against -- I'm gonna start off with what I -- and then I'm gonna go into what I'm really angry about. SB 972, that's actually a no-brainer to me. I don't understand why those people don't have their birth certificates. That just makes no sense for me.

As far as the solar panel people, I really dislike them. I dislike them because when I ran for office, I went into their meetings and I listened, and they ripped a lot of people off. So, if you wanna tax them, go right on. What they did was they sold solar panels -- 'cause I live near -- I can't even think of the city, I think of Walmart, sorry. But, I live near a city where they all had solar panels, but everybody was in the dark. So, when I sat in a meeting and I listened to them, I said, well, why didn't you sell them the bank? He said, "Huh?" I said, "You heard me -- sell them the bank, the ability to store the power."

See they're making the money, 'cause the power is going back when you're not home during the daytime, but what they're not telling you is they didn't sell the customers the bank to store the power. Because that's how it runs when the lights go out -- doesn't take a rocket scientist now. Why are all these
people in the dark? You know why they didn't sell them the bank? Because they would have to give it to 'em for 30 percent off. And so, what they told people was, why don't you go to Home Depot and buy it. And then they realized I was running for office, and I was like, uh-uh, you gonna sell it to 'em 'cause one day I'm gonna tell the Senate and -- we call it Assembly, I'm from New York -- state reps, that you guys are actually ripping off the people.

And so, we had a meeting in Meriden, and they asked me why I didn't like 'em. I said 'cause they didn't sell you the power. What do you mean? I said, it's just like a drill. If you buy a drill, and you buy the power pack, you put the power pack on, you got power, right? If you take it off and don't have the plug in the wall, you don't have power, right? She said, yeah. I said, what was the purpose of buying a power pack. She said, so that we don't have to use the cord. I said, so if you didn't buy the cord, you ain't got no power, so you're in the dark, just like me. And they were like, ohhh. That's why I don't like solar panel people. And I believe legislative created that monster, and they are a monster. And they're ripping off a lot of seniors. And people are buying solar panels and putting 'em on their houses themselves, and them and the energy industry are going at it in a fight. And if you guys don't step in, people are gonna lose their homes and children -- 'cause they call DCF and say they're ripping us off and this -- and people are losing their children. So, if you don't deal with this problem today, like I told you about the Uber two years ago, it'll be a problem tomorrow.
I also wanna talk about municipalities. I don't know if I want my union runnin' my town. [Ringing] And you talked about also, municipalities -- them choosing people when someone stepped down. A lot of nepotism is taking place. They're hiding friends -- people from the church. That's a problem. So, you need to look at that. But, I'm gonna give you a solution. I had a fire, and I lost everything. I stood in a hotel almost four months. I had to pay for it until somebody told public assistance it's not right that this lady paid for this -- all this -- by herself. Plus, I had a terminally-ill daughter. So, if I went by what you wrote here -- I don't apply. It wouldn't be applicable for everything because you put a time limit on something that nobody knows how long it's gonna take. Should you go after the landlord? Mine's was an electrical fire. I don't know how that works. That's beyond my pay rate right now, and I'm pretty sure if I hang around here long enough I'll figure it out.

And I do wanna talk about what everybody did -- boy, you guys stirred up a hornet 'cause all them parents came out with regionalization. I speak for the African-American, the Latin community, and the poor white community -- because it's not only racism, it's classism. You guys could've fixed this a long time ago. New York City is fixin' it. You know what the problem is, the schools are too big in the -- in the inner city. They're just too big. I walk around the schools, and I look around, and then they have -- the ones that are smart up here -- 'cause they got classism too -- and then they got the ones that are not so smart. They don't even eat in the same lunchroom, but you wouldn't know that because you actually don't go to the school to see what's
going on. You can't let inner city municipalities do what they wanna do without accountability.

And as far as special ed, I'm an advocate. I fight for the rights of children. I watched them tell somebody that was smart that had psychosis, "Oh, we don't pay for that, put him in summer school." I was like, "What, so he can kill all the other kids?" And he looked at me -- I said, no. My daughter, very intelligent, had a brain injury. I had to fight for them to homeschool her 'cause she can only take in four hours of education. So, the imbalance you see in the inner city, the federal government -- you were right, Senator -- they created this mess, but we have to fix it. Because to have kids that wanna go to college but can't because they don't feel like they have the grades or are smart enough, or bring home papers where the teacher with red ink -- which is what teachers do -- and you see that they can't speak or write English, it's a problem. That is tomorrow's -- they are tomorrow's senators. That's actually scary.

So, we can fix it. A task board -- a task force is good. It's a start. But I don't want us to talk about it, I want us to do something about it. New York City have alternative high schools. I was one of those kids that I did not function in a large school. I joined every gang and became popular, and ooh, I was gone. But the principal said to me, you're dying in my school, and I'm gonna save your life. She sent me to an alternative high school. I got more politically active and got kicked out, and then they sent me to another alternative high school where I fit in. It wasn't for bad kids. It was for kids that could not survive in that large setting.
So, four years later, you know what they did -- they cut down all the large schools, put three schools in a building, different assistant principals, and guess what happened? The schools began to thrive. You know why -- 'cause they weren't so big, and the teachers knew who the students were. That personal interaction was there, and that's the problem. And you need to hire teachers that look like students.

My daughter wouldn't read. We knew she could read. She was writing at two-three years old. You know why she couldn't -- she wouldn't read -- 'cause she didn't have a book. A lady gave her a book, *I fly Away*, and she went in the bathroom and she read the book over and over and over again. So, I asked her, why are you reading all of sudden. She said, the girl in the book looks just like me. And I said, oh. So, I think we should get some little girls --

SENATOR CASSANO (4TH): I gave it to my grandson.

REVEREND ERNESTINE HOLLOWAY: Yeah. I think we should get some little girls that look like you and we'll solve the problem. She said, yes. So, to solve this big problem that the federal government -- and the state played a part in it 'cause they knew the inner city wasn't workin', and ya didn't fix it while ya could. You put a Band-Aid on it, and so now it's outta control. First of all, we need to go back to the basics -- reading, writing, and arithmetics -- 'cause Common Core don't work. That's memory, not reading. And then we sit down and say we need to break this up, and then ask the urban cities, what are you doin' with that money. And then find out are they getting the right amount of money -- 'cause I found school districts that
wasn't getting what they were supposed to. So, once we sit down and figure all that out -- guess what, we'll have thriving students that they can be senators. Because guess what, somebody did it for me, and I'm living testimony. I always say, I am the American dream. I went through Hell, but guess what, I ran for mayor, I ran for state rep, and I'm here testifying before you. So, if you fix it, you'll come out with more people similar to me. No, not like me -- that won't be good -- but similar, that they'll be able to say one day I can run for office.

And I'm gonna be quiet after this. A little girl asked me, why do you run for mayor. I said, 'cause I wanna show you sweetie, you don't always have to be part of the clique, and you could do anything you wanna do. She says, why? I says, I'm the little girl from the projects that everybody said wouldn't be nothin', was really disturbed, mean, but guess what, today you're asking me, can I do what you do -- and I said, absolutely -- don't be part of the clique, be somebody different. So, to create that different that we want, us as adults, we gotta do our job.

SENATOR CASSANO (4TH): Thank you for testifying.

REVEREND ERNESTINE HOLLOWAY: You're welcome.
[inaudible-07:15:01] Yes.

SENATOR CASSANO (4TH): Madam Chair.

REP. MCCARTHY VAHEY (133RD): I just also wanted to thank you for staying with us, for being here, and
for adding a different perspective tonight. Thank you.

REVEREND ERNESTINE HOLLOWAY: Yes, I'm going to Education upstairs -- I mean, whatever that is upstairs. [Laughing] Thank you. I wanna say thank you for doing everything that you all do.

SENATOR CHAMPAGNE (35TH): Thank you, Ernestine. You never hold back.

REVEREND ERNESTINE HOLLOWAY: No, uh-uh, I came too far.

SENATOR CASSANO (4TH): Thank you. Good night.

REVEREND ERNESTINE HOLLOWAY: No. Upstairs -- I'll see some of y'all upstairs.

SENATOR CASSANO (4TH): Maria. You get to close out. ["All right" in background]

MARIA WEINGARTEN: I guess we can say good evening now, right? [Background talking] Yeah. I won't be that long. My name is Maria Weingarten. I'm a resident of New Canaan. I'm also a realtor. This is my second time visiting Hartford, as I attended the Education Committee Public Hearing a couple weeks ago, and this is a much better experience for me, so I wanna thank you for that. [Laughing] I'll leave it at that.

I come before you to testify against HB 7319. I agree with the comments that were provided by Representative Gail Lavielle and the testimony read by Terrie Wood as well. I believe that this bill
was ultimately meant to be the funding of our -- of the forced regionalization bills that are currently in the Education Committee. I have recently been appointed to the New Canaan Board of Finance, and I am a former PTC President at Saxe Middle School in New Canaan, so I can fully appreciate the tension that was discussed earlier that exists between municipal and school bodies during the budgeting process.

Our town council and board of finance is tasked with balancing the needs of our community members, that of the students and grandparents, as we talked about earlier, and that is exactly what we do. And my experience through this first budget cycle as a member of the board of finance has been the exact opposite of the testimony that was provided earlier by the gentleman from South Windsor, I believe is where he was from, who was in favor of the consolidation -- the -- creating the silos.

I just wanna make a couple quick points. Local oversight of budgeting is the optimal way to control expenses. An outside regional group will not be as successful at bending the curve of rising costs. I would be totally opposed to setting up silos and then handcuffing them with legislation that would create two-three percent increase in the ceiling, as was suggested. These silos will annually aim for that threshold regardless of whether they needed it or not. We locally have access to very granular information, as opposed to what he had said earlier. So, we know a great deal of detail from our board of education. Their binder actually is much thicker than what our town budget is.
We also have direct access to all of those appointed and elected officials, and we definitely follow up with questions. And they're very open, and it's a very collaborative process. And we have a great deal of respect, mutual respect and understanding, and we realize that we represent a whole number of different constituents, and we come together and compromise.

If this bill is implemented, I have a couple of concerns I would just highlight. One is the cost of bonding because the ratings might be different of the different towns, which cause greater rate -- interest rates. I have concerns about what might happen down the road if the schools are consolidated, and then you have to worry about teacher contracts also being consolidated. Then I would imagine there would be a leveling up in towns where their contracts are more expensive due to, you know, I guess there's also the -- you know, I'll mention it quickly here -- is the fact that they look at a town's ability to pay, and that somehow that we, as a more affluent community, are penalized in our negotiation process, which is something that might be considered here as removing that as an opportunity in our arbitration.

I also am concerned about the proportional representation of smaller towns if the schools are regionalized into something like the 50 regional school districts that was suggested by Senator Looney, and, you know, what would happen. Because I do have friends who live in Vermont and have talked to me about how, you know, in the beginning those smaller towns did have proportional representation, but at some point the larger community takes over,
and so then your funding is diminished, and you don't have equal access to what you might need for those smaller communities. So, I really see this as not a -- not a good solution.

So, and I know we were talking -- so the last thing I'll mention is, while this is not the forum in which to address the regionalization bills, all of our citizens appreciate your concerns of the quality of education for all students, and we, as citizens, all share those same concerns. We -- what I do wanna make a distinction of is that these bills right now, they attempt equalization of access only and are not focused on equalization of outcome. And I think that that's where there's -- that's the real issue -- is that we're not looking at how to make it better, we're just looking at equal access all around.

If you have the opportunity to discuss the bills with your colleagues in the Education Committee, I would request that you ask them to please consider decentralization of the failing inner city schools. Study those inner city schools. What's wrong? What's not working? How could we possibly decentralize them? How do we make them more local? Because we know, as a small community, that local access is so important, that the local involvement of families and community is what makes schools so successful as well. And I understand there's differences and there's a lot of other issues. I fully appreciate that, but I think the more we can be local, the better we'd be served, and you can really personalize education that way.
And that's all -- that's all I have to say. Thank you for letting me speak, and thank you for staying here for so long. And if you have any questions, I'm happy to answer them if I can. [Laughing]

SENATOR CASSANO (4TH): Senator Champagne.

SENATOR CHAMPAGNE (35TH): I agree with you on many of your points, and right now, you know, with some of my small towns, who are also part of larger towns, they say the same thing -- you know, that they have no control over how much money because they're outvoted every time, and they lose a lot of their say. And I worry about that, especially when we start combining smaller towns with the larger towns. I'm not for regionalization, and there's a lot of reasons for it. But, you know, the main thing is, is if this is gonna save money, come show us. Because, you know, one of the things that I struggle with is the state telling us towns that we need to regionalize to save money. The state telling us we need to figure out how to save money. We, as town leaders, run our towns very efficiently, and I won't say the same for the state. [Laughing] So, thank you for staying here all night.

MARIA WEINGARTEN: Thank you.

SENATOR CASSANO (4TH): Madam Chair.

REP. MCCARTHY VAHEY (133RD): Thank you. So, just again, thank you for being here all the way through, literally as the last speaker this evening. And, I think -- we did not -- we were supposed to hear testimony today from Katie Roy from the Connecticut School Finance, and she has testimony that I would
actually point out. I know there have been a lot of people today who have talked about the assumptions about why this bill was put in, and I think -- I always caution people about making assumptions, but I do, as I said before, understand why people -- everyone's a little bit jumpy about that [coughing] -- excuse me -- at this point.

I think that, you know, we're not the Education Committee. This came here because it has to do with the municipalities and taxation, so that's why it's in Planning and Development. But since you did address bills that were not before us today, I did just wanna respond as a former Education Committee member. I can assure you that that committee has, for many years, been addressing and studying and looking at what those effective outcomes will be and how to get effective outcomes for kids in our cities, and that there are so many -- as you're acknowledging -- so many complex issues that are in the way of that, as was referenced by the previous speaker.

I think that next week, when we have an opportunity to engage in some of the conversations around regionalization, I hope that we'll drill down a little bit because, in many ways, it's become -- at home, the "R" word was redistricting. Actually, it still is at home. But here, regionalization is the "R" word. But we do a lot of things as communities to share services, as Senator Cassano said -- things that are -- purchasing powers, for example. Those are things that, you know, we're able to do effectively and that help outcomes. In my mind, I'm willing to have the conversations about what works for our students, our families, what helps optimize.
It's not always about cost. It is about the ability to innovate, to work more cooperatively, to provide sometimes better quality of life. When we're talking about education, in particular, better outcomes and opportunity for our students -- all of those things. So, I do -- I think sometimes we talk in the broad terms, but then when we get down to it, we find that there are places that we can agree. So, I hope -- again, I'll leave it at that -- that I will urge and just implore folks to continue in the conversation and to be part of the solution in the ways that I think today's conversation has been.

Thank you. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

MARIA WEINGARTEN: Thank you.

SENATOR CASSANO (4TH): I guess I'll close this out. I keep thinking about the impact of regionalization. We have in our region, CRCOG -- I don't know if anyone knows, I guess, but CRCOG is a regional council. Senator Champagne, I don't know if you probably served on the board as a mayor. And there's a lot of things -- Hmm?

SENATOR CHAMPAGNE (35TH): Your town administrator. Yeah, usually now it's more, in fact it's got more administrators than mayors because of the work schedules and so on. But, the fact is, the planning -- planning is done on a regional basis because it's what they planned to do. The thing is it's from the bottom up. It's from each of the towns bein' around that table.

And I'll give you a simple example. Police training. They -- they train collectively at the Academy, many of them together, and we had a major
shooting at the Anheuser Brewery here in the storage facility in Manchester. Four people were killed. There would've been 15 or 20 if it hadn't been for the cross-training that took place with the various police departments. I was there. I saw firsthand. I saw fire have to stand back and wait while people were sitting there in front of 'em, but because there still was a live shooter, they couldn't tend to them. And one of them -- one of them died right there. It was a -- it was just a horrific day, but it coulda been a lot worse. And this is where there are some things that if we use our heads and we plan together, we can do successfully. When somebody tells you, you have to do this, that's a different approach. The big hammer doesn't work usually. ["A gavel's much better" in background] That's the difference. And we're -- I don't think we're looking at a big hammer, at least from our point of view, and so -- and I think that's what Wilton wants to hear, clearly, so.

MARIA WEINGARTEN: New Canaan too. [Laughing]

SENATOR CASSANO (4TH): And New Canaan and the rest of -- you know --

MARIA WEINGARTEN: I can speak for New Canaan.

SENATOR CASSANO (4TH): That's what -- that's what any town wants to hear.

MARIA WEINGARTEN: Right.

SENATOR CASSANO (4TH): You know, for every one of those 169 towns, they have elected officials that are trying to do their job and do what's best for
their community. That's their job. Let them plan and do that. So, thank you very much for comin' out and stayin'.

MARIA WEINGARTEN: Thank you very much.

SENATOR CASSANO (4TH): For all of you for sitting through this, to our staff, who had to go through this for the entire day, but it was a very, very good day -- I thank all of you.