CHAIRPERSON: Representative McCarthy Vahey

SENATORS: Cassano, Cohen, Champagne

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

REP. BAKER (124TH): I'm sorry, we're going to recess, recess for about 20 minutes to 11 -- we're going to recess for -- until 11:30. Thank you.

REP. MCCARTHY VAHEY (133RD): Good morning everyone. We are going to reconvene our Planning and Development Public Hearing and I'd like to thank you all for your patience this morning. As you know, there are many things happening in this building today and some of us, many of us if not most of us will be in and out of the Committee hearing in order to be voting in other Committees so we appreciate your patience and indulgence as we do so. So with that I will ask my ranking member, do you have any comments?

REP. ZAWISTOWSKI (61ST): No, I do not.

REP. MCCARTHY VAHEY (133RD): Wonderful. So the first hour we will have public officials and our first group up is -- our first -- first group I guess is coming up. It's Darrylyn Gorski, Bob Chatfield, McKenzie Damac, Adam Ranko and Chris Madeiros who are going to present together. Welcome.
CHRIS MADEIROS: Thank you. Good morning, Representative McCarthy Vahey. We are here to testify in support of the raised Bill 1082, CONCERNING THE CONSOLIDATION OF PUBLIC SAFETY ANSWERING POINTS.

My name is Christopher Medeiros. I am the Deputy Executive Director for Northwest Connecticut Public Safety. Located in Waterbury, Northwest is the largest non-profit regional dispatch center in the state based on call volume and population. We were founded in 1975, and we are currently the primary 911 answering point for nine towns and secondary for an five towns.

Northwest experienced steady growth over the years, until a spike in July of 2016 when we were contacted -- or contracted to dispatch Police and Fire Services for the City of Waterbury. Moving dispatch services for a major city to a regional center had never been done prior to this project, and overall has been seen as a success. We fully support the intent of this Bill to drive cost savings and efficiency in the 9-1-1 program through greater use of regional public safety answering points. We have a great working relationship with the towns in the greater Waterbury area that utilize our services and are able to provide a very high level of service at a significant rate of savings to the participating towns. However, in order for regional PSAPs to expand and prosper the funding mechanism must be changed. The current system which funds PSAPs largely by the number of towns serviced no longer work. We must move to a model that -- considers the population served and number of calls in the funding formula. I brought of the towns we support to speak more on the subject with us.
ADAM RANKO: Good morning. My name is Adam Ranko. I'm the Director of Emergency Management and the Executive Officer for Waterbury Fire Department. I'm here on behalf of Mayor O'Leary who unfortunately couldn't be here today. And out of full disclosure I also serve as a volunteer board member to Northwest Public Safety and had been there for about 15 years now.

One of the -- one of the issues that we found is that there's -- there's a bit of a disparity in the funding. One of the things is, first off it's -- if it's a call volume versus population volume the Northwest model is 29.2 percent less funded from another center that does 25 percent fewer calls. Now that particular center doesn't even integrate police. The Northwest center, it integrates all three disciplines, fire, police, EMS which is -- which is an anomaly of models here in Connecticut. But it's growing. We're only one of the centers -- regional centers, Litchfield County Dispatch integrates police as well. Of that Litchfield County Center their 10 -- the Northwest model is still 10 percent less funded and it's 43 percent less calls. So the current formula is -- is simply you know, it's a little maladjusted in that fact.

The second part of that is that the 911 subsidiary that is paid off of phone bills and things along that lines is paid into -- into that fund. That 911 fund obviously in a larger population is going to receive more money. Reflective of that, the population in the Northwest -- Northwest Public Safety contra of towns is much larger than some of the fundings yet they're not realizing the same dollar for dollar recognition of paying into their bills and then getting back the same amount of per call, per capita funding. This Bill is a great Bill. We really would suggest that it move forward.
You know, regionalization is the key to -- to keeping costs down and it obviously has kept our cost down. We'd just like to see it go a little further and have some sort of mechanism to -- to ensure that there's some sort of equality that -- that levels that funding playing field. You know, we'd be more than welcome to discuss that off line and kind of progress this along a little. I'm going to pass the mic now and we can kind of hear a little perspective from some of the -- the smaller towns and mid-size towns.

DERRYLYN GORSKI: Hi, thank you. So I'm Derrylyn Gorski from the town of Bethany. Bethany was a member of what was called -- it's South Central Connecticut Regional Communications System, which was commonly known as CMED New Haven. From 1976 until 2015. And that system pretty much collapsed because the towns were not willing to regionalize their police dispatch. Northwest Public Safety has successfully regionalized two police departments. Middlebury and Waterbury and to my knowledge, they're the only center in the State of Connecticut that actually answers police calls. The other -- Litchfield County answers the police calls for Torrington but all the other towns in that system are resident trooper towns, which is what Bethany is. We're a resident trooper town.

So Northwest is already doing what this legislation is trying to encourage. But because we did it in 2016 or 2015 we're being penalized because we're being funded under an old formula that really doesn't work anymore.

In my written testimony I included a little chart to make it easy for people and if you just look at the -- the call volumes of the regional centers you'll see that the current per call rate for Northwest
Public Safety is $9.08. With the larger population and dispatching two police departments Litchfield County is getting $13.66 per call. So it's really just -- we're just trying to look for an equitable solution to this problem. So, thank you.

REP. MCCARTHY VAHEY (133RD): Thank you.

BOB CHATFIELD: Good morning ladies and gentleman. My name is Bob Chatfield, the Mayor of Prospect and I've been the Mayor for 42 years and member of Prospect Fire for 54 and I'm still very active. So I bring that to your attention because I use the dispatch center and I'm equipped to the dispatch center and grew with the dispatch center from when they were in Waterbury the first time. They came to Prospect, we felt real good about that. When they decided to expand they went to Waterbury and we were regionalizing before it became popular a long time ago so basically I'm just here to ask for parity and the other people I think spoke but we're just looking for parity for this -- this organization so we can maintain the quality service that is there for us now. If you any questions, we're all here.

REP. MCCARTHY VAHEY (133RD): Thank you very much.

BOB CHATFIELD: Thank you.

REP. MCCARTHY VAHEY (133RD): And thank you for doing that so well together. That was awesome. Are there questions from members of the Committee? No questions? Representative Arnone.

REP. ARNONE (58TH): On the funding. Where on -- that would be a separate issue than the Bill itself; is that correct?

CHRIS MADEIROS: So it's not currently part of the Bill. It's something we're looking to potentially add to the Bill.
REP. ARNONE (58TH): So how did you come up with the funding formulas to begin with? How did the history of that fold out?

CHRIS MADEIRO: The funding formula is -- the current funding formulas are dictated by DESA right now. In November this past year they made a proposal to correct the funding based on call volume and population, which hasn't made it any further. So we're looking to advocate for that -- for those changes that DESA had already started to continue on.

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

REP. MCCARTHY VAHEY (133RD): Thank you, Representative Arnone. Any further questions from members of the Committee? Thank you all for being here today. Next we have Curt Leng.

CURT LENG: Good morning. Mayor for 42 years. I'm not sure how he's able to walk in here and walk out. Good afternoon Committee Chairs, Ranking Members and members of the Planning and Development Committee. My name is Curt Balzano Leng. I am the Mayor of Hamden. I am here today on behalf of the city of Hamden and CCM to support SB 882 along with the Connecticut Conference of Municipalities.

The recent decision by the State Retirement Commission to accept a decrease in the assumed rate of return from 8 to 7 on the CMERS plan, which while being a good financial practice, will result in a significant increase to the required contribution rates paid by municipal employers. Municipal employers participating in CMERS, which we have for the last decade with see increases of 16 percent and 21 percent unless needed updates are made to MERS program for towns.
Hamden's pension and medical expenses in the upcoming budget together make up one-third of our municipal budget now. It's a model that's just not sustainable. These changes would increase our -- our MERS expenses alone by 25 percent in two years and would equal over $10 million in the next decade. We are supporting the Governor's proposal to increase the employee contributions to the MERS program by 2 percent for each of the next three fiscal years beginning on July 1st. Currently municipal CMERS -- this current CMERS model is -- is unsustainable and you don't want to fall into a -- the position that a lot of municipalities have going from a robust 85 percent funded and look back 10, 15, 20 years from now and say, wish we had made a few adjustments.

The legislative that created -- the legislature -- the legislative branch created the State Employment Retirement System, the SERS and the MERS back in the 40s. Since then, since then there have been before changes to the State Employee Retirement Program but no changes direct to the actual MERS program, making it more costly as time has gone on. If the Committee decides to increase or not to increase the contribution rates of the employees, either way I would ask that you -- that you create a second tier within the MERS system to make it more affordable. Specifically if you could work to increase the retirement age, MERS contains a low normal retirement age of 55, 50 for police and fire, compared to the age of 63 or 65 for tiered employees in the SERS program.

I would ask that you consider raising the vesting period. MERS has a five year vesting period for pension eligibility as compared to ten years for the SERS three year plan. Adjust the earnings period. MERS retirement benefit are calculated on three
highest earning years versus five for the tier three plan. And allow for the negotiation of contribution rates on the -- on the local -- on the local level. Simply, the ability for us to have an affordable MERS program for municipalities for our town in particular, is something that I will be willing to -- to stake my money on that our unions would not object. We're looking to have a new tier for new employees that come in. It won't cost the state additional money. It will actually save the plan money and it will make it more affordable for municipalities. Thank you very much. I'm happy to answer any questions if -- if there are any.

REP. MCCARTHY VAHEY (133RD): Thank you very much, Mr. Leng. Are there questions from members of the Committee? Representative Arnone.

REP. ARNONE (58TH): So on the second tier plan, you would offer that also to police, and you would be comfortable with a higher retirement age for police officers? This is something we deal with a lot locally as you know, 55 for police officers is a good -- is a good stretch and as you get older in that profession it's much more difficult mentally and physically. So you'd be comfortable with even offering that to police officers?

CURT LENG: I would like to add it as an option, perhaps on an opt-in basis. Having CMERS has actually been very powerful for the town of Hamden to recruit some excellent officers from other towns that we're able to port and port over to a good salary and benefit, but we need to have some relief on -- on the benefit side. So if there's benefits that are offered in a reduced level and the age were not to change, that would be perfectly fine with me. I just want to see the ball move.

REP. ARNONE (58TH): Thank you for clarifying that.
CURT LENG: I appreciate that.

REP. MCCARTHY VAHEY (133RD): Thank you, Representative Arnone. Further questions from members of the Committee? One question from me. You said that -- I think I heard you correctly in saying that you thought that your unions would be open to that. Have you actually had any conversation with them about this?

CURT LENG: We can't talk about off the record conversations in an appropriate manner. I can tell you that we've had discussions with retirees that have said that if they were still in the plans, they would not have a problem with -- with adjustments, particularly adjustments for new hires. Most any person that's in a retire -- in a retirement program, whether it be a local program or the state program that I've spoken to, an overwhelming percentage, 80-90 percent just want to make sure that their benefit is going to be there. They're afraid their benefit is not going to be there in this day and age, especially looking 10, 20, 30 years down the road. So a slight adjustment to it, I don't think it's going to be something that's going to be fought hard.

REP. MCCARTHY VAHEY (133RD): Thank you, and fair enough for that answer. Very good point. Senator Cassano.

SENATOR CASSANO (4TH): Thank you for coming up. One brief question. I think I know the answer but this does nothing retroactively to any existing contract? It takes nothing away from what it is in place; is that correct?

CURT LENG: I believe that is correct, and I think that's the fair thing to do. Don't take a dime from
anyone that's earned it or the plan they've agreed on, but just allow some flexibility with new hires.

SENATOR CASSANO (4TH): Thank you.

REP. MCCARTHY VAHEY (133RD): Thank you, Mr. Chair. If there's nothing further, thank you Mr. Leng for being with us today.

CURT LENG: Thank you very much.

REP. MCCARTHY VAHEY (133RD): Next we have Rudy Marconi followed by Tony Salvatore. Welcome.

RUDY MARCONI: Thank you. Good morning everyone. I'm here today to testify on behalf of COST, Council of Small Towns. We represent approximately 110 of the smaller municipalities in the State of Connecticut, 35,000 population or below. And I would like to make several references. In particular I -- before I get into the Bill itself, I'd like to comment on HB 7192 and some of the new language that I hope you'll be seeing today, and I believe under Secretary Jonathan Harris will be introducing you to. But we have found the Governor to be very open and very much wanting to listen to the people of the state. I would like to express my gratitude to the governor and his staff for their willingness to meet and discuss these proposals which we have done. And I know 874, Senate Bill 874 is not on the agenda today, but I was very -- I'm very, very pleased to say that the Governor's staff and working with them recognize that the third wheel -- rail of education is redistricting; that there's tremendous concern over the consolidation of school districts and how that impacts all of our communities and is part of this Bill actually itself, in listening to what the concerns are of our small towns in the State of Connecticut the Governor has redrafted that Bill to eliminate the words
redistricting, to eliminate the phrase consolidation of school districts and we find that beneficial toward working together to create yet a better system in the State of Connecticut and it has to be one step at a time and we're very happy that the Governor's office is willing to listen and to accommodate the needs of the people of Connecticut.

The Advisory Council on Intergovernmental Relations, COST supports the efforts to facilitate -- facilitate shared service/regional approaches that are in fact demonstrated to produce savings and/or enhance the delivery of local services. As such, we support the Bill which enhances the mission and composition of the ACIR to focus on researching and promoting regional opportunities and efficiencies. Let's look at the cost benefit analysis before we begin forcing and implementing to be sure that the efficiencies are there.

We also appreciate that COST has appointments to ACIR and will strive to fill those appointments with representatives who are committed to engaging in a robust, productive discussion regarding shared service/regional approaches which will benefit municipalities and local property taxpayers.

Next topic is councils of government and the funding associated. COGs must have adequate funding in order to continue to support this regional shared service approach. And COST supports efforts to ensure that funding is maintained at the current levels. And there's preliminary indication that there's an effort to redo -- reduce that funding by approximately 50 percent. So it would be very difficult to on one hand be told begin working on these consolidation of services at the COG level, which will require additional employees and then on
the other side, being told you have to do it with less money. That's an impossibility.

I want to spend a little time on the Commission on Shared School Services. COST testified in strong opposition originally to 874, which charged the Commission of -- on Shared School Services with developing a plan for the redistricting and the consolidation of school districts. We have met with OPM and the Governor’s staff to discuss these concerns and as I said before, we are very encouraged that these provisions will be reviewed to focus on opportunities to facilitate shared service/regional approaches to the delivery of education in ways that will save money and/or enhance the quality of education. And I'm sure you'll hear more from under Secretary Harris on that.

Regional Assessment Division. It is our understanding that there has been a lot of discussion regarding the provisions in the Bill establishing a regional assessment division within each COG. We share concerns that have been raised by the assessors and the COGs regarding how these changes will reduce costs and affect the delivery of services. We stand ready to work with the Governor’s office and lawmakers to address these concerns. Our accessor in Richfield who has been there since 1985 has a very fixed way of looking at assessments. So anytime we introduce the possibility of a new program or the ability to do something perhaps a little more efficiently, there's a negative response. And we understand that's going to happen in a lot of these areas. People are going to reluctant initially. That's not going to work, this is how I've always done it. But there are parts of this that will work and we need to ferret out which are the positives and which are the
negatives, and that's what we're looking forward to working on.

Revaluation Zones. We appreciate that there has been much discussion about the provisions in the Bill establishing five geographic revaluation zones. And again, COST shares the concerns raised by COGs and others regarding these provisions and look forward to working with the Governor’s office and lawmakers.

On PSAPs, which you just heard a lot about, COST, 110 towns, has submitted testimony specific to the provisions in the Bill regarding the consolidation of Public Safety Answering Points. COST recognizes that the consolidation of PSAPs is needed to achieve greater efficiency and cost savings. As such, we have supported efforts to promote the consolidation of PSAPs, including providing incentives for PSAPs to consolidate and more importantly, addressing barriers that undermine consolidation efforts. We are therefore request that provisions in Section 23(d) which penalize municipalities that fail -- fail to consolidate be replaced with language that will facilitate the consolidation of PSAPs by addressing barriers and providing incentives. We need to get everyone on the same page and we know we're going to have a lot of objection from the Chief's Association. Thank you.

REP. MCCARTHY VAHEY (133RD): Thank you so much, Mr. Marconi for your remarks and for your thoughtfulness.

RUDY MARCONI: Thank you.

REP. MCCARTHY VAHEY (133RD): And there certainly has been a lot of conversation on this Bill, in other Committees and even here a bit proceeding this
hearing. I know we'll hear more today and I know it's an ongoing work in progress.

RUDY MARCONI: Yes.

REP. MCCARTHY VAHEY (133RD): And I look forward to working with folks like you.

RUDY MARCONI: Good.

REP. MCCARTHY VAHEY (133RD): To help the best -- get the best product that we can. With that, are there are questions from members of the Committee? Senator Cassano followed by Representative Kokoruda.

SENATOR CASSANO (4TH): Rudy, welcome.

RUDY MARCONI: Thank you.

SENATOR CASSANO (4TH): This is really an interesting day for us. As parents I thinking here -- as parents as my kids grow up, we're really concerned about swear words and in this building there are two swear words that are prominent today. Regionalization and tolls. Think about that. And so I liked that you shared services because that's what it's all about and that's why the COGs were expanded and created, but we've got to let them operate. We should provide adequate funding for them to do their job and the goals that we established when we re-created the new COGs will be met. But if we create them and then abandon them, which we tend to do in this building at times, then we have done nothing. We've just passed the buck and so I'm glad you've made that point. The COGs in the beginning were a little -- a little frantic about you know, how is this going to work? Well, they've been meeting and they've been working and they are sharing services and looking at it. It's interesting 'cause when I look at the regions, I look at my own town. We had a dispatch service at
the Eighth Utilities Fire District, out of the town fire district, out of the police department and out of the ambulance department. They're all now at the police station. It's worked beautifully. But of course when we did that, oh no, it can't work. It will mess up -- it worked. It works if it's done locally or regionally within that area and so I wish you all the best, each of the COGs. They have the same goals of trying to save money, of trying to accomplish things to do new things together, to lean on each other. That's the way it should be and sometimes we go too far here in stopping that from happening, so we're going to watch that and make sure it doesn't happen and this is one of the ways, make sure you're funded.

RUDY MARCONI: And Senator, with all due -- I'd like to say that combining the COGs and a partnership with ACIR and a newly reorganized ACIR with a budget allowing us to do the cost benefit analysis prior to any implementation will only gain more support from everyone.

SENATOR CASSANO (4TH): And that is so important because if you recall, I think just two years ago on our agenda was an attempt to eliminate ACIR.

RUDY MARCONI: That's right.

SENATOR CASSANO (4TH): So thank you.

REP. MCCARTHY VAHEY (133RD): Thank you, Senator Cassano. Representative Kokoruda followed by Representative Arnone.

REP. KOKORUDA (101ST): Thank you, Madam Chair. Good afternoon, two minutes. I'm just a little confused. How many COGs are there right now, nine?

RUDY MARCONI: Eight.

REP. KOKORUDA (101ST): Eight?
RUDY MARCONI: Nine.

REP. KOKORUDA (101ST): Nine, nine.

RUDY MARCONI: I stand corrected.

REP. KOKORUDA (101ST): Okay. And when we talk about the Regional Assessment Divisions that are being proposed, is there talk as part of this to really get the number of COGs down? If so, is that apprised out of concern?

RUDY MARCONI: To reduce the number of COGs? Well we did that just recently. A system that had been in place for 50 years, if you recall, a couple of years ago through the MORE Commission, worked on that consolidation of COGs and it came down to the nine. One of the issues within that consolidation are the MPOs, Metropolitan Planning Organizations, which is really the traffic arm of our COG and the FHA, Federal Housing -- or Federal Highway Administration basically has told us that the southwest region and HEVCO did not have to merge as an MPO, so we continue to operate as two separate MPOs. Is it working? Yes, but we would rather see a further consolidation there. But as far as consolidating the balance of the COGs into fewer COGs, I wouldn't recommend that. I think all of them function extremely well and there's a lot of work, believe it or not, whether you're 18 towns or 43 towns, it's a lot of work to get everyone to participate, to get everyone to get into agreement and it is also a great vehicle of communication. Because with ACIR and representation as is being recommended on ACIR, that line of communication to the COG will be invaluable for all of us because we do have great participation and I believe all COGs do, relative to the CEOs. The Chief Elected Officials do come to that table and that was one of the most important things in the MORE Commission is
to get the Chief elected officials to the table; and that was a change that was made when the initial consolidation took place so I think it functions well now. We just need to -- need to give it time and -- and the money, which is current; please don't reduce that, but -- and help through ACIR to accomplish the things that need to be accomplished to realize some regionalization and consolidation.

REP. KOKORUDA (101ST): Thank you, thank you.

REP. MCCARTHY VAHEY (133RD): Thank you Representative Kokoruda. Representative Arnone.

REP. ARNONE (58TH): If I could just add to the Senator's thoughts. Regionalization and consolidation, those words are sometimes reluctant for a lot of municipalities and shared services is what we're trying in the 58th and Enfield, we're primed for this right now. We have a larger population in the area of over 43 -- well there's 43,000 people there. We have the dispatching capabilities to help our neighbors out to reduce their costs, especially in the smaller towns that surround us. So that's a passion of mine, to see somebody to come in and help our town to achieve that and make sure we can get our neighbors to agree and to help and give good prices too, which is the paramount part of this, and control over how that price could increase and decrease over the -- over the years to come. So those are the two hurdles see in my -- in my district and I think shared services are a less forceful tact. So thank you.

RUDY MARCONI: Okay. Thank you.

REP. MCCARTHY VAHEY (133RD): Thank you, Representative Arnone. Representative Rojas.
REP. ROJAS (9TH): Thank you, Madam Chair. Thank you for your testimony Mr. Marconi. Speaking a little bit about the MPOs.

RUDY MARCONI: Yes.

REP. ROJAS (9TH): Can you explain the process for consolidating MPOs?

RUDY MARCONI: Originally when we consolidated with the old HVCO that was down in the valley, which was the greater Danbury region, it's with the Stanford area, SWRP, Southwest Regional Planning, within the organization the regional COG is the -- the transportation function. And that's a big part of what we do. We had two separate MPOs prior to the consolidation. And I'll be very honest, Mayor Martin from Stanford feels passionately that an MPO relative to his needs and concerns should be established along the coast from Greenwich to New Haven to Bridgeport and focus in the area of Metro North, in the area of 95, and the Merritt Parkway. We were looking to consolidate all the functions, both with the Greater Danbury region and the Stanford region. And the FHA told us that he, the City of Stanford did not have to because I believe they are -- I forget what kind of a census designation we call them -- no help from the background here? (Laughing) They were allowed -- they were allowed to hold back if they wanted to, and that the state did not have the authority to tell us -- what -- Governor Malloy was threatening one MPO for the entire state; that the state government could not force us into that. That that was a local issue for our decision. But we remain today as two separate MPOs. We meet at the same time. We have different agendas. We share chairmanship but that's the way it's working.
REP. ROJAS (9TH): Well does an individual Chief Elected Official have veto authority over other Chief Elected Officials in the area from moving towards consolidation?

RUDY MARCONI: No.

REP. ROJAS (9TH): So, so it could be done?

RUDY MARCONI: It's a vote of the --

REP. ROJAS (9TH): If I remember correctly, I think it's 70 percent of the Chief Elected Officials need to support it to make it happen so you could afford to lose one and still make it happen.

RUDY MARCONI: If -- if the City of Stanford wanted to come for a grant, let's say for a new parking garage. That would have to have the approval of the COG and given that he may be holding out, we could theoretically have that vote stall the funds. We don't -- we don't like to do that because it's to the benefit of the people of Stanford and the entire region that improvements like that be made. But to answer your question, yeah, there is some authority there. There's some muscle.

REP. ROJAS (9TH): And into the consolidation piece, you know I think we've gotten to a good spot with reducing the number of COGs that we've had. You know it's always kind of bothered me and that was part of the discussions when we did consolidate them. You know, the Metro COG was kind of left out there, an island of its own, and I know that you just mentioned that it would make sense to be from Stanford to -- Bridgeport or Stanford to New Haven. But there was resistance from the other COGs to --

RUDY MARCONI: There was.

REP. ROJAS (9TH): Working with the Metro and I don't know if we're at a point where we're kind of
over that and we can explore looking at a logical setup for a COG.

RUDY MARCONI: We are. Mayor Finch was in office at the time and in an effort to try and bring various groups together the concern by several of the cities involved was that Bridgeport as a relatively city in need of funding would probably qualify for all the funds that were coming into the COG and at that point there were no guidelines, no information available in distributions of the monies who would have priority, etc. I did meet with Mayor Finch at that time and he was willing to sign an agreement that if we pull them into the COG that he wouldn't accept anymore funds that -- than would normally be allocated to the City of Bridgeport. I spoke with Mayor Boughton in Danbury about that and several other people but we were too late to the table and everything was done. But I still think that possibility exists.

REP. ROJAS (9TH): Well that -- that's promising to hear. I mean I hope that there's something that can help us to get there because it just seems to make sense, particularly since we're connected along 95.

RUDY MARCONI: Well, we're a small state. We're small state geographically and if you look at the triangle of Hartford, New Haven, New York, we need to look at that in handling transportation. That's critical to the future of our community. We're losing people. I know people that move into our town will look at as far as a New York labor market, if they're working in New York they'll see -- how long does it take -- where can I live within an hour of the city? And when they look into New Jersey, they don't get far beyond the river because that's a bottleneck for everybody getting into the city. When they look into the northeast, they can get out
into Ridgefield within an hour of the city and some people are coming out as far as Newtown, but if we don't continue to improve the quality of our infrastructure, which I know the Governor is working very hard and recognizes that, we're going to continue to fall behind. And as New York and New Jersey continue to move forward, we're only going to see more and more people seeking residents who move into the greater New York metropolitan area to live in the New York, southern New York and New Jersey areas.

REP. ROJAS (9TH): And last question. Are there any functions that are currently done at the DOT level that could be devolved down to the COGs and/or MPO?

RUDY MARCONI: Yeah, that was something we discussed in the MORE Commission and actually we were hoping when we evolved into the new organization of COGs that we would see more of the engineering functions possibly being passed down to eliminate some of the delays that we see in getting a project from conception to reality. It can be painful. I've got a couple of projects going on now.

REP. ROJAS (9TH): Yeah, I remember the story of a crosswalk that took like three years to get approved, right?

RUDY MARCONI: Yeah, yeah, you'll see that.

REP. ROJAS (9TH): And that's where we should get out of the way and let you guys do that, so.

RUDY MARCONI: Right. And we can. I think we're qualified. We have engineers right now in the COG and we could expand that function if it allows our projects to move more quickly. But we have to see the benefit. We don't want to incur the cost without the benefit and that's what I was saying earlier about ACIR and working with the COGs to do
your cost benefit analysis and to actually have someone support it and transfer those functions to a more local level.

REP. ROJAS (9TH): Got it. Well thank you for your testimony. I appreciate it.

RUDY MARCONI: Thank you.

REP. MCCARTHY VAHEY (133RD): Thank you, Representative Rojas. Senator Cassano.

SENIATOR CASSANO (4TH): Just a brief comment. Your last comments were really -- there are times in May and June when Federal funds are running out and literally the state has gone to the COGs to ask them to do design work and so on.

RUDY MARCONI: Right.

SENIATOR CASSANO (4TH): And just that itself says that the COGs are capable of doing it. It shouldn't be just crunch time to save the funds, it should be part of the ongoing process, I agree with you.

RUDY MARCONI: Right.

REP. MCCARTHY VAHEY (133RD): Thank you, Senator Cassano. Mr. Marconi, thank you for this conversation and I certainly appreciate Representative Rojas' questioning related to not only the number of the COGs but the MPOs, the Metropolitan Planning Organizations and I think that this conversation talking about alphabet soup as I sometimes call, ACIR, which is a Committee on Intergovernmental Relations, COGs which is our Councils of Government, MPOs our Metropolitan Planning Organizations are just a few of the different configurations and grouping who are making decisions specifically with respect to transportation we're talking about today a lot in this building, but on a number of other regional
issues as well and it really speaks to the need for a little bit more coordination and conversation and the ability to do so as we've seen has been effective in many communities who are able to work together.

My question for you related to ACIR, I know we keep using the acronyms but I -- just for the listening public whose watching at home because you know we have those CTN junkies somewhere out there, the Advisory Commission on Intergovernmental Relations. This Bill seeks to change the makeup and strengthen it in a sense. And my question for you is, with respect to the COGs, how do you think that will work in terms of working in a complimentary way or do you see that as a potential -- potentially competitive in any way?

RUDY MARCONI: No I -- as I mentioned I think in answering a couple of the questions this morning I see it definitely as a compliment to one another that ACIR with a more direct connection here into this building and the Representatives and if you look at the makeup of that the Governor has suggested relatively to the -- relative to the makeup of ACIR with COG members as well, that information can get in one meeting right to all Chief Elected Officials and right back to here. And I think that's crucial in smoothing the lines of communication that exist at the local level up into the -- the gold dome building. And ACIR is that vehicle. It's been there for many, many years. It wasn't used to the extent that I think the Governor is looking at using it now, and putting it to work because it does have the ability to really smooth the whole process and I'm looking forward to that.

REP. MCCARTHY VAHEY (133RD): I appreciate you emphasizing that. I think there is a lot of
potential there because as we look at COGs, which is each Chief Elected Official having one vote and making those decisions and specifically too, to the MPOs, those decisions will be made by our local elected leaders in terms of how we do that MPO process going forward. Do we consolidate and become a you know, one or three or fewer MPOs than we have now is really not necessarily up to those of us sitting on this side. It will be up to you and your colleagues but what we're doing here very much impacts what kind of funds are available, what kind of projects we're doing and it really is an important bridge, I think so I appreciate the conversation today.

RUDY MARCONI: Thank you.

REP. MCCARTHY VAHEY (133RD): Any other questions from members of the Committee? If not, thank you so much for being here Mr. Marconi.

RUDY MARCONI: Thank you. Have a great day.

REP. MCCARTHY VAHEY (133RD): Next we have Tony Salvatore followed by Jonathan Harris. Welcome.

TONY SALVATORE: Good morning. Good morning Chairs, excuse me, Ranking Members and members of the Planning and Development Committee. My name is Anthony Salvatore. I am the Town Manager for the town of Cromwell and I am here today not only to represent the town of Cromwell, but CCM and support SB 882. And I'd like to take this opportunity to make the Council -- excuse me, to make the Committee aware of the dedication, diligence and hard work of our staff. We at CCM now represent all 169 municipalities in the State of Connecticut.

SB 882 includes many provisions that CCM believes that are reasonable changes to the binding arbitration process. These provisions include that
the third arbitrator be randomly selected by the State Board of Mediation and Arbitration. Currently the employer and the employee organizations agree to make the selection of the third arbitrator to the panel. We believe that random selection by the Board will increase neutrality and independence.

Reducing the panel of neutral arbitrators from twenty to ten. And we also support extending neutral arbitrator terms from two to five years. This is important to insulate neutral arbitrators from repercussions of their decisions and they do not have to be worried about being reappointed so soon after a decision.

These proposed changes would provide much needed predictability to the local budgeting process during difficult fiscal times and ensure the employees realize any benefits gained through arbitration in a timelier and more equitable or neutral manner. While CCM supports the suggested revisions to binding arbitration outlined in SB 882, we urge the Committee to consider the following amendments to Bill that would include language.

All binding arbitration cases proceeding pursuant to Section 7-473c of the Connecticut General Statutes must be concluded within a six month time period from the commencement of the proceedings. This time frame may be extended upon mutually agreed upon by both parties for a period of not to exceed one three month time period.

Bargaining for wages and fringe benefits of certified employees of the Board of Education shall be the responsibility of the municipality.

Bargaining for certain subjects such as such as retirement, medical benefits and pensions shall be done by the municipality on a coalition basis for
those in similar plans including the Board of Education. And let me just stop and explain what -- where we're going with that. I presently in town government have four bargaining units to deal with and one of the non-certified employees of the Board of Education. We -- we are looking at making some revisions, let's say to our pension plan. In order to do that they all share the same pension plan and I would have to get all five bargaining units on the same page in order to come together. This change would allow us to make those changes and they would also be for the benefit of the employees if we had that flexibility.

In assessing the financial capability of the town or towns there shall be an irrebuttable presumption that a budget reserve of 15 percent or less not available for payment of the cost of any item subject to arbitration under the Municipal Employees Relations Act and the Teacher Negotiations Act as part of this amend section 10-153f(4) which currently specifies 5 percent or less. And again, we in Cromwell are AAA bonded municipality. Our bonding agents recommend 15 percent. To go below that we would be possibly jeopardizing our AAA bondings. We encourage you to take a hard look at this and raise it to the 15 percent limit.

And finally, collective bargaining issues pertaining to regionalization of services shall not be mandatory subjects of collective bargaining. CCM supports your efforts in regionalizing and regionalization but we've got to have the power in order to deal with our bargaining units and this would be a step in the right direction. CCM urges the Committee to favorably report on SB 882 with the suggested revisions. And our staff and our organization stands ready to work with you on this. And if I might note Madam Chair --
REP. MCCARTHY VAHEY (133RD): If you could summarize please, that would be great.

TONY SALVATORE: Yeah, if I might note Madam Chair just one thing on the -- on the COGs, if I remember when they were just recently reorganized down to nine a promise was made that that would not be reduced to a smaller level as a result of that action.

REP. MCCARTHY VAHEY (133RD): Thank you for your testimony. Are there questions from the members? Representative Arnone.

REP. ARNONE (58TH): So on the -- you mentioned pensions and bargaining. You would have to bring all of your bargaining units in. You can't just do the single bargaining unit and then slowly move through the units over time to catch up on -- on improvements on mass programs like that including medical?

TONY SALVATORE: Let's take the pension, to do that it wouldn't be equitable for a municipality to try to change a pension for just one bargaining unit. You've got to get them all on board if you're equitable and fiscally responsible to municipality and make it worthwhile also to -- to the bargaining units.

REP. ARNONE (58TH): And one more thing on the -- on being overruled or not have bargaining units as a part of the regionalization effort. Do you feel at all that bringing them actually to the table may be a very good idea because a lot of the times your bargaining units actually know where the waste and the savings are in a certain issue or -- so wouldn't you want to bring them to the table, not exclude them from the table?
TONY SALVATORE: I absolutely have no problem with -- with bringing them to the table. I just don't want to see a Collective Bargaining Agreement stand in the way of us being able to regionalize, which some of the suggestions that are made by the legislatures. If I have an assessor that's in a bargaining unit in my community and another community I like to join forces with has an assessor in a bargaining unit, in order to resolve the issue you would have to get the -- the bargaining units on board. If I remember about six, seven years ago, in order to combine dispatching down in the lower southeast section of the state a specific piece of legislation was written for three towns and three towns only to allow just for that. That at the time was asked to be expanded to the entire state and unfortunately it wasn't. And those three municipalities came together and combined their dispatching.

REP. ARNONE (58TH): And I agree, it can be a little bit of a hill to climb although I think regionalization in a way is a great way to secure jobs in the future and if you -- you know, I know at least in -- if you're looking to continue in municipalities long into the future, that's always a great way to start out on your negotiations, is to say hey we're trying to preserve jobs in the future. And I hope those are the kind of conversations we can move through too when we pull through the valley of regionalization or combined services. But thank you.

TONY SALVATORE: Absolutely Representative. And again, we're not here to be anti-labor. We're here to make regionalization work and to be cost saving to our taxpayers.

REP. ARNONE (58TH): Absolutely, thank you.
REP. MCCARTHY VAHEY (133RD): Thank you, Representative Arnone. Senator Cassano.

SENATOR CASSANO (4TH): Yes, thank you for your testimony. One quick question, looking at the increases for the employers -- employees, 7 percent this year, 9 percent next year and 11 percent the year after. When was the 5 percent put in that we currently are at? Do you know that at all? I don't recall.

TONY SALVATORE: I don't remember the -- the 5 percent, what year it was but I'm not sure, Senator.

SENATOR CASSANO (4TH): All right. But we're over the next three years more than doubling the contribution and that's hefty. Whether we agree with it or not, it is by definition hefty if you're going up 50 percent or more than that, 100 percent, so that's something of concern. Thank you.

REP. MCCARTHY VAHEY (133RD): Thank you, Senator Cassano. Are there further questions? Senator Champagne.

SENATOR CHAMPAGNE (35TH): Thank you for coming in today. You said CCM is in favor of this Bill. Do you think -- I know in my experience we've come across impartial, what -- what was neutral arbitrator who wasn't so neutral and we don't want that person back. Do you think this would prevent us from saying no to that neutral?

TONY SALVATORE: I don't believe so. I think you could still evaluate the -- I think the actually -- at the time that the person is appointed there possibly could be an evaluation and not -- and not have that individual selected as a neutral arbitrator but I don't -- I don't think they should be in a position where they've got to worry about
every decision and worry within two years if they're going to get reappointed so.

SENATOR CHAMPAGNE (35TH): It says -- it says here, the State Board of Mediation Arbitration shall select a third member who shall be impartial representative of the interest of the public in general and who shall be selected at random. And I know we've come in contact with -- with somebody who is supposed to be neutral who absolutely is not neutral and when I read this, I believe that this takes the ability away from the municipality to say we don't want that person.

TONY SALVATORE: Yes, it does but it also -- we're - - we're hoping that the Labor Board will in fact pick true neutral independent arbitrators to fill this position and at this time we're willing to -- to give it an attempted shot at doing just that.

SENATOR CHAMPAGNE (35TH): Okay. And the Municipal Employee's Retirement System, do you know of any municipalities that were allowed to leave that after they signed up?

TONY SALVATORE: No.

SENATOR CHAMPAGNE (35TH): Because like Senator Cassano said, you know we have some hefty increases coming and I think that if it could be done in a more economical fashion, do you believe that towns should be able to move away from the municipal employees retirement system?

TONY SALVATORE: I think an analysis would need to be done to see what the affect would have on the -- the system. If a number of municipalities did choose to leave then it could affect the ability and the strength of the system. I would rather consider some of the suggestions that CCM is making to the
system then -- if you start allowing everybody to move away then your ability to pay is going to be called into question.

SENATOR CHAMPAGNE (35TH): Okay.

TONY SALVATORE: So perhaps an analysis of just that question should be done first before any decisions are made on allowing municipalities -- I'm probably going to go against some of my --

SENATOR CHAMPAGNE (35TH): Quite a few of them.

TONY SALVATORE: My peers. I understand but in my opinion it possibly could call into question the strength of the system. But I also see that we need relief. The portion to municipalities has not been raised as far as I know, ever. Excuse me, the portion to the employee has never been raised as far as I know, never. So that -- that causes me great concern. And I think the tier system is something that should definitely be considered and looked at.

SENATOR CHAMPAGNE (35TH): Okay, thank you.

REP. MCCARTHY VAHEY (133RD): Thank you, Senator Champagne. Further questions? I would just point out I don't believe that we have your testimony electronically at this point so if you could just make sure that the Clerk has procession of it, which I'm sure you gave that in, but just wanted to let you know that.

TONY SALVATORE: I will, Madam Chair. Thank you.

REP. MCCARTHY VAHEY (133RD): Thank you for being here with us today.

TONY SALVATORE: Thank you.

REP. MCCARTHY VAHEY (133RD): Next we have Jonathan Harris and we will then be switching back and forth between the public officials list and members of the
public. So Ann Munaskey will follow Mr. Harris. Welcome.

JONATHAN HARRIS: Thank you, Madam Chair and Chair—Co-Chair Cassano, Ranking Member Champagne, and Zawistowski. Thank you for the entertaining us here today. I'm flanked here by the people that actually do the hard work. I'm just the talking head. We have Dan Morley, Jennifer Gauthier, Patrick Sullivan and Martin Happ. And I have them up here as subject matter experts. We want to make sure that you have all the information. I'd like to just sort of give the context of the Bill 7192 and because we have that, which has a lot of sections; and 882 I won't comment on each section. Hopefully we can get to that due questioning if that's okay with the Committee?

REP. MCCARTHY VAHEY (133RD): That sounds--that sounds wonderful. Thank you, Mr. Harris.

JOHNATHAN HARRIS: It is good to be back again in my old stomping grounds when I used to sit where Representative Baker was for six years and continue an important conversation. So let me give you some context. We're here today because of conversations that started a couple of months ago when I had the privilege to be appointed as the Undersecretary of Intergovernmental Relations and the people flanking me have been having these discussions for a while with all the stakeholders, many of whom you can see around this room here today. And based upon those discussions before the Bill was drafted we created a framework; the ability to have a discussion, a fruitful discussion on a pathway forward on how to better provide services to our citizens. And I want to just address some things up front that I've heard throughout this because not only do we have the conversations beforehand but there's not a day that
goes by that through meetings, telephone calls, emails, running into this building that we're not advancing those discussions and I'll show you actually, it's already yielded some results on how this Bill is moving through the process substantively.

But I have to say that this Bill is in the larger context, part of Governor Lamont's vision for Connecticut for economic growth, for prosperity for all of us. And part of that is the way to effectively deliver services to our citizens. Now, sharing of services, this has been discussed for a while. I was Mayor of my community a decade and a half plus ago and we were discussing it and at that point it had already been discussed for probably decades before that. What this Bill tries to do is set up a framework to have meaningful discussions, to use data that can be measured, to bring people together like we've done so far so that we can actually try to advance the ball. It is not, I repeat not about sharing or consolidation for the sake of sharing or consolidation.

It is also not about saying, you know municipalities and having been a municipal official, it's not about saying you guys are inefficient. Run like the state 'cause we're so efficient. It's not about that. But we all have to realize that the layout of the map, this 17th century design has inherent inefficiencies in it even though most municipalities internally operate in an efficient manner. We're not trying to threaten the tapestry of our communities. The marketplace of different types of municipalities in Connecticut is a benefit, quality of life, picking different levels of service, different types of areas. We want to preserve that but we want to make sure that we do things in a more thoughtful and effective way.
So it's not also about saying, okay let's just add another level of government. Nobody wants to do that. But we already have three levels. State, regional and local and the question is, how do you re-jigger services, re-tool among those levels and as Chairman McCarthy-Vahey said, even within levels of different regional bodies for example, to be able to deliver services better? The goal being that we want to provide services that are efficient, that are effective and that are responsive to needs of residents and businesses. This Bill 7192 is the framework to have those conversations. It appoints if you will, the Advisory Commission on intergovernmental relations as the body re-tool, bringing people together to have these detailed discussions on where we should be going and make recommendations to you all and other policymakers to see how we can get together and achieve what I just described.

It also has the piece that was in Senate Bill 874 creating a commission on shared school services costs to be able to have that similar analysis on the school side and as you'll see in this Bill through consultations, through mutual reporting; those two pathways are integrated. One ACIR focusing on the municipal side and two, COST focusing on the education side. Not to force anything, but to have that discussion to have data-driven policy that you can decide upon going forward.

And just a show quickly and then hopefully we can get to questions, how this has been a learning process for all of us. There was some controversy over SB 874. We totally understand that. The Governor's Bill which was always intended to be more of a platform for study and recommendation, but under some strict timeframe so we get it done, not
just go study something; use of words like redistricting, consolidation tied that in many ways to some other more draconian proposals out there unfortunately. 874 is being amended and attached to your testimony. I have a proposed amendment for HB 7192, which similarly gets rid of all of those swears as Chairman Cassano says, and actually you know clarifies it. It's about collaboration. It's about recommendations not about forcing regionalization. Still tough conversations, but ones that I think we can all agree, it's time we really, really have and move forward on.

We also listed to the Assessors and Collectors and we've had numerous meetings with them and there will be an amendment proposed that will eliminate the section of 7192 that calls for the merger of the functions, not the jobs, but the functions of the Assessors and Collectors in one department because of the input that we've had, and we've had today. You'll hear some very good conversations with the Collectors on other pieces of this Bill. So with that, I want to thank you again for allowing us to come here and discuss and we will try to answer any questions you have.

REP. MCCARTHY VAHEY (133RD): Thank you very much, Mr. Harris. I imagine there might be a couple. So we have Representative Zawistowski followed by Representative Carney and then Representative Arnone.

REP. ZAWISTOWSKI (61ST): Thank you Madam Chair and then you for coming here today. Since we received the amendment on the education portion of this I don't need to even ask you about any of that anymore. I want to focus on the assessment area and I want to -- I want to kind of piggy-back on what Representative Kokoruda asked before about the reval
zones. Could -- I'm just trying to figure out why we have five reval zones versus nine COGs and you know, what was the basis for that decision and why aren't they lined up with COGs.

JONATHAN HARRIS: Well they actually are lined up with COGs in that we've done in answer to the question about how many COGs you should actually have. We want to COG borders, the nine Cristine but what we've done is we've paired COGs together to bring that down to five because for this service delivery it makes sense to have fewer regions but still keep the integrity of the COG borders.

REP. ZAWISTOWSKI (61ST): Okay, so it's not going across COG borders, it does leave them intact?

JONATHAN HARRIS: Combining two. There are -- there would be three -- in three instances two sets of COGs would be combined to make the five regions.

REP. ZAWISTOWSKI (61ST): Can you tell me which ones were combined?

JONATHAN HARRIS: Yeah, we can give you a map but it was the -- I have it right here on the --

REP. ZAWISTOWSKI (61ST): Just for the purpose of the hearing for the people who aren't here.

JONATHAN HARRIS: Northwest side, the western COG with the northwest hills, the metropolitan COG with south central and the lower valley, river valley COG with the southeastern COG.

REP. ZAWISTOWSKI (61ST): Okay, thank you. This does set up regional divisions within -- regional divisions for data collection with the COGs as well?

JONATHAN HARRIS: Yes.

REP. ZAWISTOWSKI (61ST): That's correct? It mentions having a secretary for each zone. Is that
something -- a position that the COGs may already have?

JONATHAN HARRIS: A secretary?

REP. ZAWISTOWSKI (61ST): Yeah, it mentions in the legislation a -- a secretary for each reval zone.

JONATHAN HARRIS: The secretary -- what I think you might be thinking about, Representative within the reval zones to get revaluation coordinated over a period of time within the zones, the secretary of OPM is empowered to accept that schedule, to make sure that -- to try to coordinate reval within these zones and the real purpose of that is to create a much larger coordination and much larger data set to help save money on contracting and to have better information out there for all of us for policy making. And for getting as much as we can out of our grand lists.

REP. ZAWISTOWSKI (61ST): Okay, yeah. I wasn't -- I wasn't clear of the legislation just mentioned with the secretary and it's in a section about the other. That probably --

JONATHAN HARRIS: We'll take a look at that. Thank you for flagging that.

REP. ZAWISTOWSKI (61ST): Yeah. Yeah, I think it needs to be -- I can give you roughly a line number -- about -- it starts at 959 --

JONATHAN HARRIS: Okay.

REP. ZAWISTOWSKI (61ST): If you want to take a look at it after. All right. It also mentions penalties for the towns that might not supply the data. It mentions such penalty should be the -- this starts at 983. Such penalties shall be forfeited in the amount otherwise allocable to the -- to such municipalities subject to Section 7 dot, dot dot.
Loss of 50 percent of the amount of grant that's payable to each particular -- municipality pursuant to 3-55i, etc. I was wondering if you had any insight into that or if that's something you need to get back to us on.

JONATHAN HARRIS: No, that's a (inaudible - 01:36:02) Grant.

REP. ZAWISTOWSKI (61ST): Okay.

JONATHAN HARRIS: And the idea here again for purposes of discussion is we've had a lot of -- not just discussion but even legislation which has attempted to lay out opportunities for towns to share services. And a lot more has been done as I sit here today than say, you know a decade and a half ago when I was a municipal official. So progress has been made on that. But the question is, and this puts this squarely on the table; there are carrots, there are incentives which are in this Bill and that which we need, in particular to fray the costs of sharing services up front, but the question is like, should there be at times what we might call a stick? In this case it's not a penalty, it's just saying the state is not going to give you discretionary grants that you have come to rely upon if you don't work towards changing the map and that's the idea. And part of it is not just the specifics for this section, but to have that discussion about how we cannot just give money to do it but also have that other side of trying to coax because it hasn't always worked without that.

REP. ZAWISTOWSKI (61ST): Okay. Yes, it does specifically mention a penalty. That's what got my attention. But no, we actually -- we had a very similar Bill come through this Committee last year and it -- it didn't make it out of Committee, similar to this section as far as supplying data. I
can kind of understand where it's coming from but I'm always very sensitive when towns are getting penalized if -- if for -- you know, noncompliance on different issues.

JONATHAN HARRIS: Right. We can share -- we share that concern with you. And I just want to also clarify here. This is not taking the assessment function, which is at and still will be if this passes, at the local level. What this part -- section is trying to do is say when it comes to the data collection and processing that assessors need to do their job, that that should be done on a regional level, economies of scale, saving money on contracts, perhaps having dedicated IT staff that can deal with people that have -- have issues in getting that data. Now I will tell you, getting that data to the regional level, underlying this proposal and many of these proposals is that we need to improve on our information technology. Without IT and the ability of a taxpayer to be able to upload their information directly to the COGs, if we're just saying paper like it is in a lot of places now, it's not going to work. But the idea is assemble the data, larger data sets, save money on contracts and then the assessors can draw on that larger data set to do their jobs better because they have more information with which to do their evaluation. They're not going to spend time like Jennifer did when she was the assessor of Haddam or of Southington, sitting there entering things when they can go out in the community and canvas and see; has someone put an addition on their porch? Well we've got to capture that. So there's a lot of benefits not just in cost savings but improvement in service, improvement in the value of grand lists.
REP. ZAWISTOWSKI (61ST): Well I certainly get the reasons but maybe we can talk about this is a little bit more off line.

JONATHAN HARRIS: Sure.

REP. ZAWISTOWSKI (61ST): One last question. I was going to ask about merging the tax collectors and the assessors into one department on a municipal level. You said that you've had some discussions with the assessors and you may have some amendments coming up? Can you just summarize that a little bit because I was -- I had some concerns about how that was going to work.

JONATHAN HARRIS: Yeah. We're going to propose an amendment that will get rid of -- of that -- of that section of the Bill and you know, that could be part of the discussion that we have through the ACIR process.

REP. ZAWISTOWSKI (61ST): Okay. Thank you very much. Thank you, Madam Chair.

JONATHAN HARRIS: Thank you.

REP. MCCARTHY VAHEY (133RD): Thank you, Representative Zawistowski. Next we have Representative Carney followed by Representative Arnone.

REP. CARNEY (23RD): Thank you very much, Madam Chairwoman. Thank you Jonathan for coming here today and testifying on these Bills. So I have questions specifically related to Section 7 through 10. So my first question is relatively general. What is the end game of this Commission? What's the purpose?

JONATHAN HARRIS: Well there is no specific end game as far as a policy end game. We want to achieve policy A, for example just like on the municipal
side with ACIR, there's not a specific policy end game we want to achieve with this particular policy. What it is, is a way to actually take what's happened for decades with some but not enough progress and actually task stakeholders to take a look at how we can better share services on the municipal side and the school side. And I will say again to clarify and to you know, confirm the original intent -- intent that the Governor had, the amendment that we're offering that's attached pulls out any words that might make someone think that there's an end game. Because not only do we not know all of the answers and we need data-driven discussion, measured data that can be tested but in addition to that, there's really not a one size fits all answer in the State of Connecticut. The rural area northeast for example is different than the rural area in the northeast. So there will be probably a patchwork of different ways that we can get back to the basic goal of being more effective, efficient and responsive in our service delivery.

REP. CARNEY (23RD): So then am I to be correct? Unfortunately I don't have the amendment in front of me. But am I to be correct then, because I know there was some discussion from the Governor's office about sticks versus carrots and incentivizing school districts or penalizing school districts who don't go along with particular plan that would come out of the end of this, but what you're saying now is there is no plan. So his remarks related to that are no longer in play with this legislation?

JONATHAN HARRIS: It's a planning process, one. A process of developing recommendations really to be more accurate. In SB 874, I haven't seen that amendment. There is one section in that Bill which wasn't in 7192 which said that under certain criteria for towns, I believe in a statute that was
passed with no carrots or sticks several years ago, there was a you know, a request that there be sharing of superintendents. In that Bill there was something that said that if you don't do it then -- and it's your decision 'cause local rule should work; then you would sacrifice if you will, based on your choice the salary for that superintendent. If you want to have your own then pay for it. That would come out of your ACS. That's the only -- and I don't know that Bill like the back of my hand, but that's the only thing that I think in that Bill 874 that would be any type of a stick. It's not in this Bill.

REP. CARNEY (23RD): Okay. So I know you were talking about sort of a patchwork of different experiences, different types of folks. So that's why I guess I'm a little bit concerned about the makeup of the Commission. I only see one parent and it just says a parent of a public -- who has a student in a public school. There's a lot of different types of public schools out there, you know that large, small, urban, rural, magnet schools, things like that. So, and I don't see, I know there's designees for -- from CEA and AFT. We know that those aren't necessarily going to be educators representing them. So I'm just curious as to why there weren't more -- there's not more representation on the Commission from public school parents, and also current public school educators?

JONATHAN HARRIS: One, it's a good question. Two, it's a good point. And I think that we should connect you with the people on the school side that actually were developing that. I'm really more on the ACR side. And just as we've been doing on the ACR side, I'm sure there would be willingness on the COST side to have discussions about the best makeup. Because again, the goal is to have the most
effective group of stakeholders, the multitude around to be able to have representation. As a matter of fact, even on the ACIR side, we have right now a cutoff of towns at 20,000 or below. Mr. Filchak who you'll hear from later, says well in my district in the northeast that means we could be left out because we're only 10,000 or below. So we're looking at making an adjustment on that. I will tell you, the only real reason that the cost piece is in this particular Bill is because since we wanted to integrate ACIR with COST there were reporting pieces in 7192 that reference COST. So as a matter of appropriate drafting, legislative drafting we had to have the language that created COST within this Bill or else we'd be referring to something that didn't legally exist yet. So that's why. So we should hook you up with -- with some of the people that have been working in details on that to make sure they hear what you're saying.

REP. CARNEY (23RD): My next question, I mean I'm looking through the various types of reports and it just seems to me there's a lot of focus on cost savings. There's a lot of focus on size. I don't see a lot of focus on quality. And is there a reason for that?

JONATHAN HARRIS: I think that behind all of those pieces of studying is quality. The intent here is to, as I said at the beginning, deliver services whether it's municipal or school that are effective, efficient and responsive. And the intent behind this, I know from speaking with the Governor and others, is to provide the best educational services for kids. And we do have to remember in this state, even when people complain that we're high cost, there is a notion and it's especially important with our children; you get what you pay for. So it's not just about cutting costs and letting the kids you
know, blow in the wind if you will. That is without
the doubt I know, not the intent of this. And if
that needs clarification then we should talk about
that.

REP. CARNEY (23RD): Okay. Appreciate that 'cause
there is a lot of concerns in my district. I
represent a district where the schools are really a
source of pride, they're always very well ranked and
our school system as a whole in the State of
Connecticut is always ranked really high. It's
always you know, public K-12 I've seen lists where
it's 3, I've seen lists where it's 5 and that's
really -- I mean it's tremendous for our state.
We're not always ranked high in a lot of other areas
but to be ranked so high for schools, for public
schools means I think that we're doing something
right in a lot of places. There's always room for
improvement in specific school districts.

So I know you were talking about economic growth and
prosperity as being a reason for this -- these two
pieces of legislation but I really -- I'm not sure
we really need to re-invent the wheel in a lot of
cases with schools, so I know I've heard a lot of
concerns not only about this piece of legislation,
the other two pieces of legislation as well from --
from Senator Looney and Senator Duff, which have
cauased a lot -- a lot of concern, and it's really
unfortunate to see a lot of concern from folks in my
district. So I just think that I'm not so sure that
we really need this Commission. I think it's just
going to create a lot of additional anxiety and
extend that anxiety to try and reinvent something
that in a lot of situations, particularly in my
district, doesn't really need to be reinvented. I
appreciate you though coming here to testify. And I
look forward to seeing any additional changes or
amendments.
JONATHAN HARRIS: Thank you. Those are all good points and you know if I may, when this is put through the process to the extent that there are, and there are many, I'm part of the public schools in Connecticut, districts that are functioning well and that are not top heavy with administration or other examples that I've heard from many of you at different times, then there should be no change. And that would be the result that would be yielded with data, with the stakeholders around the table of this -- of this process. But to the extent, you can save some money and put that money to the classroom to the kids, you can improve education also in the State of Connecticut. We know budgets in all municipalities are strained. I had a quick conversation with someone that said our schools are -- we are below average in the cost per pupil. We are above average in our results and he said, so we shouldn't change our districts. I said, that's true. But if you're small enough does it mean you shouldn't share a superintendent? Because maybe that frees up more dollars that you can put towards the classroom. So those are the types of discussions that we need to have with the end focus always on education on the kids.

REP. CARNEY (23RD): Thank you very much, John.

REP. MCCARTHY VAHEY (133RD): Thank you, Representative Carney. We have Representative Arnone followed by Representative Rojas.

REP. ARNONE (58TH): Thank you. A couple of questions. Change it up a little bit. 882, on Section 2 for the pension changes in the pensions. There seems -- there is two increases and one references the age survivor insurance system. Are these two separate increases for two separate policies or two separate retirement plans?
JONATHAN HARRIS: They're all under MERS. There are MERS employees that contribute to Social Security that are currently paying 5 percent and that there are those that -- excuse me, that do not contribute to Social Security that are currently paying 5 percent and have for a while. And there are employees that actually do contribute that right now are at 2-1/4 percent contribution, so that's kind of the breakdown. They're actually I believe as hazardous and nonhazardous. There's a couple other pieces but that's the simple way of looking at it.

REP. ARNONE (58TH): That -- that explains that quickly, thank you. One more which is 7192, Section 15, tax collectors. So why -- can you explain -- and it's actually mentioned in here twice, it's page 32 and then again on page 34 on line 1072, I'm just confused on if this is going to eliminate elected officials and replace them with appointed officials? It kind of reads both ways in both sections. It's been extremely, really confusing even to the people that sit in those positions.

JONATHAN HARRIS: The Bill as currently drafted, and we'll take a look to make sure we -- we deal with it if it continues the way drafted that we deal with any confusion but yes, the Bill as currently before you does have the movement towards all appointed tax collectors just as was done for assessors a decade or so ago.

REP. ARNONE (58TH): Yeah, and that's I guess the issue with -- the appointment is a little open-ended so there's really not a lot of how you would deal with somebody being elected that is being vetted by an entire town and somebody being appointed that's being vetted, unless I'm getting it wrong, from just the Selectmen or whatever form of government they have.
JONATHAN HARRIS: Well it would -- first of all let me clarify. You use the word appointed, it's really hired as your finance director would be, as your parks and rec director would be, as other municipal department heads would be. So that's -- and we also -- we realize that there are currently elected tax collectors, actually 77 of 169 towns and this would grandfather those that had been elected or will be elected prior to July 1. And I just want to also add that we are not by putting this out there for discussion, in any way trying to disparage the current elected tax collectors. The ones that I know do excellent jobs. There's -- there's certifications there. It was really trying to figure out, to have a discussion to move towards a different system as we had with accessors to kind of set the table for some of the other items that will be studied by ACIR. And it's a discussion that we can continue to have 'cause you know, there are a lot of really, really good elected tax collectors. But there was a notion, they'll tell you that there might be more political for hiring and maybe in some instances it would be, that to get the politics out of it, the election of tax collectors is a vestige of old New England and that we've all probably been in a situation, I've never been with a tax collector, but I'm sure our respective town committees and on the ground in the municipalities where it's like, oh my God we don't have anyone to fill that spot. We better find someone to fill the spot when a position like tax collector, the revenue that they bring in is so crucial to the town. And again, that's not to say that any one of the 77 is somehow not doing their job now.

REP. ARNONE (58TH): Right. And like I say, they all -- they have to run, they have to put their credentials out to the public in order to get those
votes and again, and sometimes the public views this as another way of government to take their -- their voting right away. And that's -- that's an issue for a lot of small towns that have historically old forms of government, like Selectman. That's -- that is probably one of the oldest forms of government that goes back to Colonial time. So sometimes people get upset when they see these little parts in government that may relinquish their right to choose.

JONATHAN HARRIS: I can understand. I can understand that but I would just respond that we're not getting rid of democracy within the municipalities. There still will be elective legislative bodies and sometimes elected finance boards, people that will oversee and make the decision. So there still is a direct tie from the voters to the leaders of their municipality. It's a just a question about what should or shouldn't be elected. I mean, should we elect finance directors? That would give -- that would give citizens a choice in that, but maybe there's some positions that we should discuss that going forward should be brought on board. Should be hired in a different way. But the tax collectors that are elected have made some very good points.

REP. ARNONE (58TH): Thank you.

REP. MCCARTHY VAHEY (133RD): Thank you, Representative Arnone. Representative Rojas.

REP. ROJAS (9TH): Thank you, Madam Chair. Thank you, Secretary for being here today and all the other staff. On 7192 with the funding formula for COGs, how was that particular formula arrived at? I've been involved in discussions around funding and you know, this is just the lamest one that I've seen
and I guess, what is it based on? It's a $75,000 grant with a 30 percent per capita.

JONATHAN HARRIS: Right. Well as I'm sure you, Representative the COG funding whether its been grant funded and there's been different grants or a line item in the budget as it has been recently, has been all over the place. I can show you sort of the numbers. And one of the things that we set out to do, given that we want to be able to rely more on the COGs is to create a more predictable funding stream for them. So we took a formula and actually put it in statute. The numbers in that formula actually we took what had a previous formula and we went to 60 percent of that formula. We cut down the base amount to $75,000 and the per capita amount to 30 percent -- 30 cents per capita. And the reason we did that is because the discussion we want to have is, what do we provide for COGs at a base level for them just to run and what do we provide on top of that using the regional planning incentive account to actually pay them to do the types of work that will help us provide more effective, efficient and responsive services? And so it's that mix. So the numbers is open. It's there because we want to say, we're serious about giving you stability. The level is under discussion.

And the other discussion also that as part of this we're trying to have is, what do we expect out of all COGs? Not all COGs are the same, just like not all municipalities area. What do we expect as a baseline and what are some of the things that some COGs like where I served on CROG might do that some others don't do or that another COG might do that CROG doesn't do, and how do we create those centers of excellence so that we're not duplicating things even on the regional level?
REP. ROJAS (9TH): Thank you. And another area in Section 6 it talks about that the Secretary of OPM may provide funding for joint provision of government services, planning study regarding -- why not a shell as opposed to a man? I only ask, you know the current secretary might be wonderful on this issue but a future secretary may not and withhold funding, and you know I know over the years we've given the COGs funding then we take it away. We have the (inaudible - 01:58:48) account, then we sweep it. So a lot of it is on the legislature and in conjunction with the administration of actually holding to our word on providing funding for COGs but certainly when there's -- any time there's a may, it may not happen.

JONATHAN HARRIS: Representative on approp -- Oh no, you're not here.

REP. ROJAS (9TH): I'm not in his chair.

JONATHAN HARRIS: So you should talk to your -- your brothers and sisters on appropriations.

REP. ROJAS (9TH): I've been in the room begging, but I lost. (Laughing)

JONATHAN HARRIS: And if they'll fund that, we can put that as a shall.

REP. ROJAS (9TH): Yeah.

JONATHAN HARRIS: But I think that's part of it. I mean -- we do want some discretion here because we want to be able to be flexible too, but the goal is to make sure that we have enough funding. In this case what we're doing is going back to the old -- older method of funding through the RPIA, the Regional Planning Incentive Account, which is an intercept of car rental tax and hotel tax that in the past when the economy wasn't even as humming --
humming as much, yielded about $11 million so we're hoping it will do that plus to be able to find -- we're willing to discuss that.

REP. ROJAS (9TH): Sure, thank you. And on the School Consolidation Commission. You know certainly we've asked that Commission to look into a lot of things and you know, certainly it's been interesting for me to hear the whole debate about -- you know a lot of rhetoric around forced regionalization, local control doing this and that and the other and certainly, I know Senator McCory kind of eluded to it in the Education Public Hearing but a lot of this has to do with a race in class -- issues around race in class, at least in my opinion. And I just wonder if there's any room for this Commission to actually look at the question of racial -- racial segregation and economic isolation in Connecticut and the ramifications that that has for our school district. And in particularly in the context of how many open seats are in our more affluent predominantly white communities that are sitting empty but are otherwise being subsidized either at the local level or by the state? And I wonder if there's room within that commission to look at those topics, because it's a giant elephant in the room. There are certainly additional costs that the state incurs, and perhaps all taxpayers incur by not addressing this issue of racial segregation and economic isolation in Connecticut and I think there's an opportunity to do some good things there, because all children benefit, but being in an integrated setting, right? Not just the kids of color from Hartford, and I'm wondering if there's any room within the Commission to look at that issue?

JONATHAN HARRIS: The intent of the Commission is to provide the best educational services for all of our students in Connecticut to the extent there are
factors which influence that, which impact that, I would think that that would be something that would be -- willing to be discussed.

REP. ROJAS (9TH): Yeah, and in terms of the goal of providing the best education, you know? It's impossible for the best teacher in the world to bring 30 children who are in their classroom who are behind in reading, up to reading level when they simply just -- you know when you can't teach 30 kids in the classroom who are behind, and that has to do with race in class as well. So the whole question about quality education, I'd like to frame it that way because that's really where we need to be putting our energy. I mean one, it's illegal. We have a legal responsibility to do, but certainly perhaps more importantly there's a moral obligation for us to look at it and unless this body asks for it, I don't think it's every going to get done given we're 60 years after Brown vs. Board and we're still moving at deliberate speed. Thank you.

JONATHAN HARRIS: Thank you.

REP. MCCARTHY VAHEY (133RD): Thank you, Representative Rojas. Are there further questions? Representative Delnicki.

REP. DELNICKI (14TH): Thank you, Madam Chair and good to see you here.

JONATHAN HARRIS: Likewise as well, Representative. How are you?

REP. DELNICKI (14TH): I want to thank you for all the help that you gave us in the crumbling foundation issue and --

JONATHAN HARRIS: Thank you.

REP. DELNICKI (14TH): I think you really know where South Windsor's townhall is now, right?
JONATHAN HARRIS: Oh, I do. Yes, I do.

REP. DELNICKI (14TH): You came a number of times. I want to thank you for this little synopsis sheet you provided us with and it's provided me with an opportunity to come up with some questions here pertaining to the intent. Established back offices at the COGs to process certain assessment data. Is there any intent here to provide or actually to have the COGs at some point take over or assume back office operations of communities within their council?

JONATHAN HARRIS: The intent here is just for back office for the purpose of collecting and processing reval and assessment data, parcel data that then can be used by local assessors to free up their time and more effectively do their jobs because of larger data sets. That's the intent of this. Other discussions, if you have ideas, would be you know, relegated to the ASIR process.

REP. DELNICKI (14TH): Thank you for that clarification because I know there would be a lot of interest in that, both positive and negative from various communities. Section 21 allows municipalities to override their charters to share or consolidate services. Can you just address that a little bit as the intent there and how the overriding would occur, especially when you take a look at how the charters are typically set up and how they are -- they are sacrosanct to a community?

JONATHAN HARRIS: Yeah, that is just the providing the municipality with the flexibility if their elected officials so choose to be able to decide to do more sharing of services and not have to go through what we know is -- can be an onerous and often time so daunting a process that it doesn't happen, charter revision. You know, it's giving the
municipality the tools to be able to participate. And while it seems kind of heavy-handed in some ways I guess, perhaps, you know we do have to remember that municipalities are creatures of the state government and the state kind of gives this traditionally. We've accepted this legally and culturally. Gives the municipalities power to do certain things. And this is just a way to give municipalities the ability if their elected leaders so choose, to share services.

REP. DELNICKI (14TH): You know it's interesting you make that comment because municipalities historically have been all but given that grant as a right of existence and that's -- that's why I raise that issue. And I think it goes to the concept that there is a process that every municipality has if they choose to enter into altering their charters.

The Section -- Section 22 to 24 promoting the consolidation of public service answering points. And I will relay an anecdotal story about that back about oh God, it's got to be 15 years ago when Tom Delnicki was a town counselor, Chief Tyler tried to organize a contortion of five towns to come together with a PSAP -- common PSAP and we found out that was a very difficult process to -- to try to facilitate for a number of reason. Different operating frequencies of the radios, different bargaining unit contracts, different types of terrain. How do you address that?

JONATHAN HARRIS: That actually goes to my underlying comment before that a lot of what we're trying to do here does require a technological base that we need to achieve here in Connecticut. The interoperability of the public service answering points now actually is much improved over what it had been years ago. But there still are dispatchers
that operate off different systems. Our MS-CAD systems and one of the, I think first pieces, the building blocks that have to be put in place is to continue to provide more interoperability. And as one person involved in the discussions through the COGs has said, it's not even about taking a look at where we are with technology now, it's looking down the road. We've got 5G coming. What other technological advances are there going to be that will help us knit some of these dispirit PSAPS together? Collective bargaining? Some of those other issues will also have to be taken into account and one of the things that ACIR is tasked with studying is coalition bargaining which has now support and discussions both from the labor side and management side. So there are other pieces to study out there to make this a reality.

REP. DELNICKI (14TH): And it's -- you must be reading my mind because I was going to ask the question pertaining to coalition bargaining and how that would actually work because let's say you have five municipalities that come together as we attempted to do years back. And each one with a different -- radically different contract pertaining benefits, pertaining to pay scales, pertaining to all that. Would that be something that would end up being arbitrated or common agreements or what?

JONATHAN HARRIS: I think that is what has to be figured out. The details of how you overcome some of the balkanization in that way.

REP. DELNICKI (14TH): And do that point you actually lead me to my next question pertaining to the Connecticut Advisory Commission on Intergovernmental Relations. Currently, and I have to apologize, I didn't add up all the numbers of the
members of it currently. How many members are there currently there?

JONATHAN HARRIS: 23 is it? 23, 23? And I believe that -- and we've had different innervations of this now to go to about 25. We'd like to keep it as representative as possible but not as -- not make it too large and unwieldy and the thought also is that there would be numerous subcommittees that would be dispatched to deal with particular pieces. There's also been a lot of discussion about the free opportunity for research. The Federal Reserve Bank of Boston actually does a lot of top-notch research if you get on their radar, pulling in organizations like that. Better utilizing Yukon and some other of our higher educational institutions to try and develop things. So we want the membership to be representative but not too big and then be able to branch out into other areas through these other methods.

REP. DELNICKI (14TH): And to that point, lines 113 through 145 actually delineate who the memberships would be. Do we have a total on that? And again I apologize for not having the numbers.

JONATHAN HARRIS: No, no, no, I had -- and I didn't put it in my little notebook here. I think it would -- it's at 25 at the way this was drafted.

REP. DELNICKI (14TH): So it stayed at 25 (crosstalk)?

JONATHAN HARRIS: It's right around that, in that area. That's -- it's still -- Mr. Filchak always giving me proper information, says this is at 23. I thought we had bumped it, but. We did pull away from some of the agencies that sat there because they could be pulled in if they needed and we really wanted to have the Chairs and Ranking Members of
this Committee sitting because we wanted to have a direct tie into the legislature.

REP. DELNICKI (14TH): 'Cause obviously you don't want to make it so big that it would become unmanageable. There's a number of quasigovernmental entities that have Boards that are, well the MDC is 29 voting and 4 non-voting and that's -- that's almost totally unmanageable if you take a look at the numbers there.

Section 26, requiring boards of education act upon collective bargaining agreements. Isn't that currently done by virtually all the Boards of Education, that they -- once they have a tentative agreement, the Boards act on it in a couple of --

JONATHAN HARRIS: I think -- I think my understanding is what can happen in different situations like here is that non-action becomes approval. This section is intended to require action by the legislative body.

REP. DELNICKI (14TH): And secondly, I see no reference to either a Finance Board or a Town Council and in many communities the Finance Board or the Town Council has the right of refusal of the contract, sending it back to the Board. Does that in any way eroded?

JONATHAN HARRIS: That's a good question. I don't know the answer to that. I will take a look at it and thank you for flagging that.

REP. DELNICKI (14TH): The -- I'm looking for the appropriate line number. I want to say it's line number 210, regional revenue sharing. How would that work because many communities want to have development in their communities and many communities don't want to, which is kind of counterintuitive but there are communities like
that. And if they were in that, in essence council, that geographically combined area for sharing services, how would that work?

JONATHAN HARRIS: That's what would be analyzed using data by ACIR because there are a lot of different models, some of which to me personally make sense, some which don't. So that would be one of the 13 specific areas that the Advisory Commission on Intergovernmental Relations is tasked with delving into.

REP. DELNICKI (14TH): And this may be another question that will be difficult to answer but it was intriguing when I read, reduction of long-term liabilities of municipalities. Is that -- when we talk reduction of long-term, are we talking pensions, are we talking bonding? Or is that all open?

JONATHAN HARRIS: It -- it's all encompassing the way that we drafted it, again it's to try to do everything that we can to free up resources for services so we can provide them in the most effective, efficient, and responsive way to businesses and residents.

REP. DELNICKI (14TH): So then in essence this Commission could touch upon existing pension programs whether they be defined benefit or defining contribution, bonding that a community has on the books?

JONATHAN HARRIS: Yes, all that -- all that would be on the table to take a look at.

REP. DELNICKI (14TH): And line 207, alternative sources of revenue from municipal government's regional councils of governments and regional education service centers. And I have a feeling I'm going to get the same answer, that that's like
something that's going to be looked at that we don't really know where it's going to go.

JONATHAN HARRIS: Yeah, there have been numerous suggestions over the years on alternative sources of revenue. Some again which might make some sense and which might not, and this is to be able to have a data-driven analysis and discussion of that topic.

REP. DELNICKI (14TH): Could that include things like a say a regional sales tax, things of that nature?

JONATHAN HARRIS: Anything that's an alternative source of revenue I think would be game to be analyzed under that broad heading.

REP. DELNICKI (14TH): Well thank you for coming.

JONATHAN HARRIS: Thank you.

REP. DELNICKI (14TH): And again I want to -- I want to say it's nice seeing you up there. I enjoyed and appreciated the work that you did as Commissioner of DCP and I'm looking forward to working with you here.

JONATHAN HARRIS: Well you're welcome, and thank you for all your help. I enjoy working with you too.

REP. MCCARTHY VAHEY (133RD): Thank you, Representative Delnicki. Representative Haines followed by Representative Rojas.

REP. HAINES (34TH): Thank you, Madam Chair. Thank you very much for being here today and thanks for testifying and answering all kinds of crazy questions here, but --

JONATHAN HARRIS: Nothing is crazy. All good.

REP. HAINES (34TH): Good. Something from just the basics of this is you're mentioning that this is for
economic growth, doing a better job, more efficient, more effective, more responsive to the needs we have both for the state, the regional and the municipal levels. With these two councils that we're setting up to do this and to grab the data and make the recommendations, where does that all go when we're done? Like who -- who is the Secretary that you talk about from the very beginning of this? Like where does all this recommendation and all the data points, where does all that end up? Whose desk decides what to do with all of this?

JONATHAN HARRIS: This is -- there are a whole host of different reporting mechanisms in here and there's some, I know there's one particular piece of districts reporting on, municipalities reporting on things that they're already sharing and reporting to the Secretary of OPM, Melissa McCall. And then also making lists of things that could be shared going forward, and same reporting. And then in that instance, the Secretary of OPM is required to provide that information to ASIR and COST. So that's one example.

But ultimately, these bodies will yield a series of recommendations through the work planning process that's outlined and if that would be -- if changes were going to be made, it would be up to the Governor and this body, the way the process works to have Bills, have public hearings, entertain them and ultimately vote on them.

REP. HAINES (34TH): Okay. Thank you. Just a couple of followup, more down -- getting down to some nitty-gritty questions. In regards to the data collection there's a -- I imagine there's some kind of formulated framework as to what data points you need, like who is setting these data sets that are
being collected by say the COGs in these back offices. Who sets that up?

JONATHAN HARRIS: If you're referring to Representative, the -- the Regional Assessment Division, it's the parcel information that is -- and the personal property information, motor vehicle information that is currently collected by the Assessor. So the idea is technology, send it up to the COGs, COGs compile that larger data set, again freeing up some time for Assessor's to do other important activities to develop their main list. They ultimately get the data back electronically and do what they always do, assess.

REP. HAINES (34TH): So it's already collected?

JONATHAN HARRIS: Yes.

REP. HAINES (34TH): So nothing new that we're looking at?

JONATHAN HARRIS: Nothing new. It just --

REP. HAINES (34TH): Different information?

JONATHAN HARRIS: How it's collected, electronically, where it goes for processing to get economies of scale. And think about it. Right now if you're an assessor and you have your data collected and you're looking at the data, this slice to do your evaluation; there's benefit to being able to value if the COGs collect it and they collect it from all of the municipalities within that region and you have this amount of data from which to make your decisions. So that's part of what's attempting to be done to make them more effective. And again, eliminating some of the -- the nitty-gritty work on the local level. Not changing their assessment function, but eliminating that and using economies
of scale to get that done should free up time for COGs what value or discover list and value.

REP. HAINES (34TH): Okay, thank you. And one last question. In regards to Sections 22, 24 consolidating public service answer points. This is -- this sounds like there's going to be some kind of infrastructure that's going to be put in place to facilitate that. You know, you talk about building blocks. Who -- who's paying for that building block? We're trying to get cell towers in the black holes of the black hills of Connecticut places. In order to do this we've got a lot of gullies and mountains and hills in the middle and who's paying for all that to make that work?

JONATHAN HARRIS: I can't ask -- answer the specific question about what towers and things like that, but the general answer to it is, right now all of us pay .59 cents per line on our phone bills. And that money is collected into an E911 fund and it's used for grant purposes, to defray the costs -- upfront costs in this case of sharing services, and we've actually made that grant a little bit more flexibility, allowed a little bit more money to be -- to be used to defray the up front costs. And then there's some that's used for a subsidy for existing PSAPs to be able to operate. So within this universe of PSAPS, that's the funding mechanism that we'd rely on and we continue to rely on. So there -- it's now capped at .73 cents per line and I believe the charge now is .59 cents per line that creates this money.

REP. HAINES (34TH): So no new revenue stream that you're going to need for that? Okay, thank you very much. Thank you, Madam Chair.
REP. MCCARTHY VAHEY (133RD): Thank you, Representative. Representative Rojas followed by Representative Kokoruda.

REP. ROJAS (9TH): Thank you for a second time too. Thank you. On the PSAP consolidation you use the number of 40,000, server population of 40,000 or more. Could that number be higher? And I only ask because so many of our smaller communities have already regionalized. They've already done the hard work and it's actually towns like mine that really should be consolidating and I wonder if we set a -- you know that leaves East Hartford and Machest -- I mean I guess it allows them to maybe do more but doesn't necessarily incent them or direct them to serve larger populations, so I wonder how we arrived at the 40,000 number?

JONATHAN HARRIS: You've got -- you have 53,000 approximately in East Hartford?

REP. ROJAS (9TH): 60 in Manchester, 51 in East Hartford.

JONATHAN HARRIS: The number was derived, it's actually a Bill that passed in 2009, which I think I voted for in full disclosure.

REP. ROJAS (9TH): It was passed unanimously. It was only vetoed by the Governor.

JONATHAN HARRIS: Vetoed by the Governor, right. By Governor Rell and -- so that was kind of a line that was picked to try to get to 60 municipalities that had not consolidated. Now there is some really good conversation occurring that really even population is not the way to go but really is call volume that we should come up with, and that maybe the 40,000 not only is it just an arbitrary number in general but it might not be the best way to look at it. There is some discussion also about how far down the
road you go now with having two or more consolidate when maybe through the ACIR process we realize that you need to have an economy of scale of 250,000 or 300,000 to provide the highest quality dispatching service? So those are all kind of being delved into now.

REP. ROJAS (9TH): Okay. No, and I appreciate that because I know you're probably familiar with the Kimball study. It's probably quite dated now 'cause it was seven years ago but even in that study 88 percent of Connecticut PSAPs are getting less than four calls an hour and 50 percent are getting less than one call an hour. And the rest of the country somehow figured out how to do PSAPs on a far larger regional basis and also to the extent that people think there's some kind of reason that why it can't happen in Connecticut; all we have to do is look at the rest of the country and see that it is being done and that it hasn't impacted service or quality of service. Certainly I think we have the dark station issue that we'd have to deal with here for some of our smaller communities, but you know, I know there's clauses of a lot of things but we've got to get to a point where we're not reinvesting capital dollars every five to seven years to outfit 110 or 111 PSAPs in this state. So there are savings to be realized and certainly there are services that can be approved upon. I just think we even need to force communities like mine to think a little bit more about getting to a consolidation. And I know my Mayor has been generally supportive of moving in that direction but in the absence of some stronger sticks, which have to be had, because otherwise nobody will move; we need to look at large communities too. So thank you.

JONATHAN HARRIS: Thanks.
REP. MCCARTHY VAHEY (133RD): Thank you Representative Rojas and before I go to Representative Kokoruda I'd just like to point out that the amendment is now available on line under Dave Ries' name so if folks would like to take a look at that they can do so. Representative Kokoruda followed by Senator Cassano.

REP. KOKORUDA (101ST): Good afternoon.

JONATHAN HARRIS: Good afternoon.

REP. KOKORUDA (101ST): I just -- you made a comment and I missed the middle part. What do you see -- you started -- you said something about municipalities are what of state government?

JONATHAN HARRIS: Creatures. I mean legally the state peels off authority in a legal sense to give to the municipality to operate. Municipalities don't have their existence really but for the blessing of the state government as a general -- as a general legal proposition. So this notion of the state actually being able to say, give more flexibility in this case to municipalities who threw their elected leadership determined that they want to share services, to give them the flexibility to that, is consistent with our -- the way that we govern and the way we have historically governed on a legal level.

REP. KOKORUDA (101ST): I know you've been involved with state government a lot longer than I am, but I'm really surprised to hear that. I actually thought we the people, we the people were the ones that made the decisions and when you answered the questions from Representative Delnicki, it scared me. It's so broad. I have to ask you, 'cause I know I don't understand all of it but what I do know is it seems like we are -- we the people are having
some of our rights taken away of us with some of this legislation. I am concerned about it. So when you talk about allowing or directing, those are two very different words and I just think -- would you say that if I go back to my two small towns they're going to feel like they've not lost any of their rights? They're going to feel that they have not lost control of how they run -- how the people of their community run their towns?

JONATHAN HARRIS: I don't believe so. I mean we the people, you are we the people.

REP. KOKORUDA (101ST): Right.

JONATHAN HARRIS: They elected you here to make a decision about whether you should allow -- should allow the elected officials of the local area who also are elected, to override their charter. So they've elected you, we the people, to do that. As far as the recommendations go, you can't get in this case like so specific that you are not giving the ability of these organizations, the stakeholders, to study things. So there are some broad categories, which we can fine-tune. That's a fine discussion to have. But ultimately ACIR, COST cannot say, towns you don't have this right. People you don't have this right. You can't do this. You've got to do this. They're recommendations. That has to come back to you, we the people, to be able to vote on it and in a democratic process determine it. So I guess I -- I don't understand -- I understand your concern about making sure that people don't lose their rights but I don't understand how giving stakeholders, legitimate stakeholders as you can see, the ability to analyze stuff based on data so that then democratically-elected officials can make decisions is depriving people at a local level of their rights.
REP. KOKORUDA (101ST): I just think if I have a voice up here as you say, I only have a voice because the people of my community have given it to me. I gain no power for being part of this general assembly. I have my voice and I've been given the right to vote up here by the people of my community and it really concerns that it seems this year we're just picking -- picking away we the people, and starting to think we're in charge. And I'll tell you, it's just -- I just know that so many little towns are struggling. I agree that there are so many towns -- times that a government did get out of the way and I agree, some of this might help that people could get things done. I think regionalization has been stymied to some extent by some of the rules, the Bills that were passed up here, some of the state statutes. But I'll tell you, it's very scary to me some of the conversations up there that I hear this year that we the people are not number one. We give -- we the people give us our authority to do anything and we try to take power away from we the people, I think we're really, really stepping on dangerous, dangerous points. That's not what the voters of my community thought I was doing up here. So thank you. We'll continue to work. I am worried about how broad -- broad some of the answers you gave to Representative Delnicki and as we work through it, I'm concerned what small towns are giving up here and what's being taken away from them that really they have a right to keep. Thank you.

JONATHAN HARRIS: Yeah, there is no intent to do that and if you have specific -- specific examples you'd like to discuss of how this takes away the rights of your -- of your citizens, you should come to us and talk to us about it.
REP. MCCARTHY VAHEY (133RD): Thank you Representative Kokoruda. Senator Cassano.

SENATOR CASSANO (4TH): Thank you, Madam Chair. And this is by the way an amendment. So Mr. Secretary, welcome.

JONATHAN HARRIS: Thank you.

SENATOR CASSANO (4TH): This is something that probably should have been before this party 20 years ago quite honestly. We've seen pieces of this happen and other areas it has not happened. I've had the good fortune right after 911 to be appointed to a group called Safe Com, which is doing much of what, has been doing much of what's here. The reaction from many people in the very beginning, this was an attempt to put together and share communication services, emergency response services and so on. It's interesting that the most valuable and sometimes the most difficult services, emergency response that has been one of the first areas that sharing of services have taken place. And right in our hometown, and I think Representative Rojas was there. I know I was there, just at the Anheuser Busch shootings. Nine people were killed. It would have been much higher than that but if you look at the response that day the first police -- police officer to get to that building was from South Windsor. The second one was from Manchester. The third one was from East Hartford. The fourth one from Manchester and so on, because they had trained regionally and they knew what each other was doing because they were a regional team. It made a tremendous difference. It's really -- I have not forgotten the impact of that.

Serving on a national basis, I can tell you I have seen just experience after experience, we saw this week as an example the flooding and so in in
Nebraska. We saw it last week down in the south and so on. We have been very fortunate and I don't think we've had anything like that since the Halloween storm but it paralyzed us. 169 communities, sometimes referred to in Connecticut as 169 principalities can't function individually. We just can't do it individually. When it's flooding, when it's fires, when it's all these other kinds of activities, we need to be doing things on a regional basis. Sharing our resources and working as one, not working within our boundaries. And that -- this is a big step in trying to move in that direction. Long overdue. And so I applaud you for bringing this -- this forward. I see it as a work in progress for years to come and I think I see it also as building the confidence and the cost of sharing those services. And by the way, the smaller towns will probably benefit more than the larger communities because they don't have the resources to do much of this but they will be served and that in itself is important. So thank you for bringing this forward. I look forward to the process.

REP. MCCARTHY VAHEY (133RD): Thank you, Senator Cassano. Representative Zawistowski followed by Representative Gucker.

REP. ZAWISTOWSKI (61ST): Thank you, Madam Chair for the second time. I just came across another section of the Bill that I had tabbed before hand and didn't ask you about before. There's a requirement for ACIR to create a report that -- report lists each existing state mandate and continuing report annually of new mandates going forward. And it mentions that these reports need to be put together and submitted to various -- I guess the initial report goes to the Appropriations Committee. What -- what kind of action is anticipated to be taken on this report. It really doesn't -- it kind of leaves
you hanging. The ACIR needs to put together this report and submit it but is there any action that is recommended or required after that point?

JONATHAN HARRIS: That's existing law. We've changed the reporting times to make them actually make more sense and be able to be administered in a way that -- that's more effective and efficient but that's exactly one of the things. I mean you kind of, Representative hit the nail on the head of what ACIR sort of was versus what ACIR wants to be, with by the way and picking up on the Representative's good comments you know, having elected officials actually sitting on ACIR to tie that to the elected population. We want it to be more than just a reporting mechanism.

REP. ZAWISTOWSKI (61ST): Are there existing lists?

JONATHAN HARRIS: Yes.

REP. ZAWISTOWSKI (61ST): That are floating out there that we haven't seen?

JONATHAN HARRIS: Yes, there is the Compendium of Mandates which is done very four or five years, Dan? Every four years. And then there's a supplement that's done every year, which just has a list of mandates given to Appropriations so you can have the information to see what's being mandated by the state on towns, which does have an effect actually on control of towns and gets to the Representative's point in large part about mandates. But it's up to Appropriations I believe as to what you do with it.

REP. ZAWISTOWSKI (61ST): Thank you. I do sit on Appropriations so I think I will be following up for that -- for a copy of that report. But no, I do appreciate it and I understand the use for it. It just -- it seems that reporting just -- it leaves it hanging out there and just without knowing if
there's any action being taken or if recommendations are even being made, so thank you very much.

JONATHAN HARRIS: That's why I hope you'll support the new stepped up reinvigorated version of ACIR.

REP. ZAWISTOWSKI (61ST): Thank you and thank you, Madam Chair.

REP. MCCARTHY VAHEY (133RD): Thank you, Representative Zawistowski. Representative Gucker.

REP. GUCKER (138TH): Thank you, Madam Chair. I almost left when I saw you coming but I knew at the last hearing you made me sit down to listen to you, so.

JONATHAN HARRIS: You may learn something too. And I got you the information Saturday.

REP. GUCKER (138TH): I might learn something so I knew I had to at least sit here and -- (Laughing). I have a couple of concerns especially with the you know, eliminating the neutral -- the neutral representation. I agree that we should seriously explore coalition bargaining but how do we do that fairly and effectively if ACIR -- if labor representatives don't have the same amount of seats?

JONATHAN HARRIS: When -- when you say eliminating the neutral, we're not eliminating the neutral we're just changing the way the neutral is selected. Right now the Department of Labor selects a Committee that is five labor representatives, five management representatives, one of them has to be a CCM. That body selects a panel of neutral arbitrators. When arbitrations occur on contracts, there is a labor representative and a management representative and those two representatives get together and decide who off that panel of neutral arbitrators will be the neutral in the arbitration.
What this Bill is doing, 882, is saying it's not going to be a decision of those two representatives. It will be a random selection from that panel. So you're still going to have the neutral arbitrator.

REP. GUCKER (138TH): And if I could? Have you been talking with Organized Labor about this arrangement and what do -- what are you feeling back from them?

JONATHAN HARRIS: We've been talking not only to Labor but with everything. We're talking on both sides. They're not in favor of it. They've raised some good points that they think that by allowing the selection you instead of having the neutral beholden to the selectors it operates in a good way because it keeps decisions from being out of whack, whereas if someone is selected randomly, they're not maybe as tied to who selected them and they might go off and do something drastic in the decision-making power. That's one of the -- the arguments to counter it.

There is notion from the management side that with this arbitrator the neutral being beholden to get reappointed, and they're two-year terms too, we're trying to make those five, another way to create addendunts among the neutrals; that maybe people just go to arbitration because it's not worth trying to negotiate up front and they're going to select the people that they think are best for that, notes a mutual decision and they let it roll. And there's most cost in the system because of that. That's another argument that's been -- that's been raised.

REP. GUCKER (138TH): I still have some concerns with that and I do look forward to -- looking forward to actually looking over this more often and see what's involved. The other concern I have is with the consolidation of emergency services and such as that.
Danbury a number of years ago took the dispatch center out of the Danbury Police and basically sold it off to a lowest bidder contractor. And what happened with that, their idea was that well we can take more police out of the dispatch and they could be on the street doing what they do best. The problem that arose was that experienced officers who were answering these phones knew by the tenor of the call or the tenor of the emergency how urgent or not urgent it was, knew of the locations knowing the district better. What ultimately happened is with Danbury outsourcing this dispatch center it lead to inefficiencies, it lead to police officers being dispatched where there was no emergency. In fact at one point we almost lost an officer due to one of these situations where he was in dire need and was calling in for backup and help and they dispatched himself to his own crime scene. I get concerned with regionalization at that point to where hopefully the people that would be taking over this -- if you're talking about dispatch or any of those other services, know the area, know the district, know what is involved in those -- knows the geography involved. Have you talked with emergency responders or police or fire on that -- on those ideas?

JONATHAN HARRIS: Yes, and they've raised those issues. One of the questions I've asked that we need to explore more is why now in the age of technology when I can Representative, zoom in right on your house from my phone right now, whether that's the same as it used to be as far as knowing where the yellow barn was within a community. But that's a -- that's an open question. Larger PSAP units that can hire more dispatchers as opposed some, one or two, you have the ability to also diversity of skill sets. There might be somebody
there that's more skilled in dealing with someone that's about to commit suicide, someone has another skill set and you kind of get a broader range there. And remember, and I'm not saying that -- that they don't raise good points, but if you look at other areas, New York City central dispatching, they were able to handle 911 without the system crashing. So there are -- and that's just one mega example, but there are a lot of examples where other areas, other states, counties have much larger dispatching systems that work. So these are the questions that we're puzzling through right now.

REP. GUCKER (138TH): Well I thank you for coming in and if you need more information on that I can point you to the problems that we have in Danbury that the police and the fire are still -- are still dealing with. But I want to thank you for coming in and thank you for making me stay here and listen to your testimony again.

JONATHAN HARRIS: You're welcome. Neglected cemeteries. That would -- first of all, please get us the information. I just want to give you one other quick piece that when it comes to the neutral arbitrator also one of the thoughts is because there beholden to the two sides that select them, there's more of a baby spitting that goes on and that perhaps not all arbitration should have baby splitting, so that's another thing I just wanted to add for you to think about.

REP. MCCARTHY VAHEY (133RD): Thank you, Representative Gucker. Senator Champagne.

SENATOR CHAMPAGNE (35TH): Thank you. Thank you for coming in today.

JONATHAN HARRIS: Thank you, Senator.
SENATOR CHAMPAGNE (35TH): I'm going to ask you a question I already asked somebody else, and the neutral under this. If the neutral ends up being not so neutral and the municipality no longer wants this person, am I still bound to take them because they were selected randomly?

JONATHAN HARRIS: The way the Bill is written now, if they're randomly selected, yes. The way that you would be able to deal with that situation would be on the reappointment of the panel, which now is every two years. The Bill calls for it to be every five years. But that's how you would eliminate someone who's not neutral from the panel.

SENATOR CHAMPAGNE (35TH): But again, keep dealing with them until then?

JONATHAN HARRIS: If they were randomly selected, yes.

SENATOR CHAMPAGNE (35TH): Okay, huh. And does this Bill prevent us from using AAA arbitration?

JONATHAN HARRIS: I don't believe it does prevent that.

SENATOR CHAMPAGNE (35TH): Okay.

JONATHAN HARRIS: But that's something that I -- I can look at. There's nothing specifically in there that does it but we'll get back to you on that.

SENATOR CHAMPAGNE (35TH): Okay. And then with the PSAPs. State police regionalized and then they -- they undid what -- because it didn't work, they undid it. Do you know why that happened?

JONATHAN HARRIS: We're looking at that. Some of it might have been process, how they did it, culture, but it is a model that we're looking at to make sure
that we have all the information to make the right decision.

SENATOR CHAMPAGNE (35TH): Okay. And if you do do that, how far out would -- would that be?

JONATHAN HARRIS: The consolidation?

SENATOR CHAMPAGNE (35TH): Yeah.

JONATHAN HARRIS: I believe it's five years. I might be getting -- there's so many different pieces of this, but that -- they have -- they'd have a five year period to be able -- before they -- if it went -- if it passed the way it is before there would be any loss of the E911 subsidy for not combining with two or more towns. It's not immediate.

SENATOR CHAMPAGNE (35TH): So if the town decides they don't want to regionalize and they don't take the subsidy, can they remain --

JONATHAN HARRIS: Yeah.

SENATOR CHAMPAGNE (35TH): Their own-- Okay.

JONATHAN HARRIS: Yes.

SENATOR CHAMPAGNE (35TH): That was just one of the questions. All right. That's all I have. Thanks.

JONATHAN HARRIS: Thank you.

REP. MCCARTHY VAHEY (133RD): Thank you, Senator Champagne. Are there questions from other members? I do have a few. I think we have effectively covered almost every section of 7192, however, if I'm not mistaken in section 25 I don't know that you touched on the inspections by Fire Marshalls specifically and I wanted to ask you why the change? What -- what was the reasoning behind that?
JONATHAN HARRIS: We sat the Fire Marshalls by the way and they're supposed to be getting us some alternatives, which I can describe to you. Apparently in a lot of municipalities, bigger cities in particular, it is not possible for them to do the inspections on the frequency required by current law and what has happened in certain instances, that even in situations where an -- the lack of inspection wouldn't have prevented a fire or any death or injury there has been liability that's been put on that municipality for not having done the inspection. So the question was, how we kind of better reflect the ability to do the inspections with where the inspections are needed to be done. And the way that it was first looked at was based on the number of units. The Fire Marshalls raised a very good point -- many good points, one of which was it's really not the size of the units. It's the age of construction. It's whether the building is sprinklered or not and so they're supposed to get us this different criteria so that maybe we can have some relief from a yearly requirement but based on some factors that actually are consistent with and promote public health and safety.

REP. MCCARTHY VAHEY (133RD): Thank you for that because as a lay person of course I'm -- and all of us, we're all thinking about safety first so I appreciate that explanation.

The other section that I don't think we really touched on much was section 1. And I wondered if you would talk a little bit more about that and the mechanisms that are being suggested to be put in place there with the Municipal Finance Advisory Council.

JONATHAN HARRIS: Yeah. There is an existing body, the Municipal Council -- Advisory Council, MFAC
which already has a role to play in trying to keep municipalities stable. There are audits that are done on a biannual basis and if there are certain irregularities in those audits there can be a referral to MFAC to be able to deal with that and help correct the situation so that municipalities avoid fiscal crisis. What this section is attempting to do is to actually have better early detection of fiscal challenges in municipalities before it reaches fiscal crisis, before they are candidates for the Municipal Account of Yearly Review Board, MARB. And so it basically says that if there are these certain irregularities or if there is an audit which shows that the reporting wasn't in conformance with GAP accounting standards and the municipality didn't get permission not to do that, which means there could be a problem, then there could be a referral -- there would be a referral to MFAC and the municipality would have to explain why, 'cause there could be a valid reason or we just didn't think we had to get permission for example. And they would be required also to do a corrective plan to make sure that there was no problem here.

The other piece is that there are already in statute certain fiscal indicators that the Secretary can look at and they're listed in that section whether it's you know, declining fund balance, other indicators that a municipality is struggling. And the idea is if those appear on the radar screen, is to get them into discussions with MFAC sooner rather than later to avoid the financial slide, to a point where it might be not just extremely difficult, in some cases almost impossible to correct what's happening over a reasonable period of time.

REP. MCCARTHY VAHEY (133RD): Thank you for that. So in a sense preventive measures is the goal.
JONATHAN HARRIS: Yeah. I -- you know it's a triage type of thing. It's you know making sure that you know -- you're going to your doctor and you're following your health regimen and working out before it gets to the point where you've got to go to the ER.

REP. MCCARTHY VAHEY (133RD): So I'd like to go back for a moment to a question and conversation that you had, I think it was Representative Carney who talked about -- or asked you what the end goal is with COST and -- but also I would say with ACIR. And as I have been listening to the conversation today and again putting my social work hat on, one of the things that strikes me is that in some respects the end goal may not exactly be clear. That with what you're trying to do is to gather data and to do some assessment and understand. And I'll give an example. In our community many people know that I'm working tobacco prevention efforts and in order to understand what steps we needed to take we provided a survey opportunity to our parents and students so that we could understand exactly what was happening. That's a little bit of what I see. It's not everything that's happening here but is it fair to say that part of what you're trying to do with this is really to gather more information in one place and provide a mechanism that will allow you to effectively not just have a report that sits on a shelf that we can't have actionable items, but we can then see where we do need to go in order to provide the best services possible. Whether it's for our students or our residents.

JONATHAN HARRIS: That's exactly what we're trying to do. As a matter of fact you took a minute to do what I have struggled to do in an hour and half, so thank you.
REP. MCCARTHY VAHEY (133RD): Well I know there are a lot of details that we need to work out and certainly this Bill has many sections and I appreciate that this will be an ongoing conversation with all of you, with the members with this Committee and our colleagues in the General Assembly but I appreciate that fact because in order to be effective in what we're doing we have to know where we are and have that sense of assessment. So if there are no further questions from members, I thank you very much for your time here today and for all of the answers you provided.

JONATHAN HARRIS: Thank you to you, Madam Chair and to the Committee for their thoughtful questions and comments.

REP. MCCARTHY VAHEY (133RD): Thank you. We will now be switching between members of the public and our elected official or officials list, so Anne Manuskey is next and she is to be followed by Representative Meskers and Howard Richman. Forgive me, and I think it's Anne Manuskey; is that correct?

ANNE MANUSKEY: Manuskey, but that's okay.

REP. MCCARTHY VAHEY (133RD): Okay, thank you for clarifying. Welcome.

ANNE MANUSKEY: Good afternoon Senator -- excuse me, Representative McCarthy-Vahey, Representative Cassano is not here, Vice Chairs Champagne and Zawistowski. Hopefully I said your name correctly. And Members of the Planning and Development Committee. My name is Anne Manuskey. I'm a 21-year resident of the State of Connecticut, a happy resident of the town of Easton which is a very small town in the state of Connecticut. It's so small that we follow the state statutes. We do not have a charter. We have a first Selectman, two other
Selectmans, a Finance Board and a Board of Education. So the discussion is near and dear to my heart in what is proposed.

I am in opposition to Governor Lamont’s budget Bill here. I’m very concerned on regionalization and adding additional layers to our current government. This will not improve our state municipalities or regions.

My main concern since 2012 has been public education. Our public school children and districts are receiving exponentially more funds and yet the NAEP and ACT scores continue a downward trend. Statutorily, Common Core's Pilot Study has lapsed as of June 20 -- I'm sorry, June 30, 2019. Public school assessments such as Smarter Balanced, which lack external validation therefore have no test credibility and SATs for 11th graders which also have some questions as to its credibility, post Varsity Blue of the Federal Government recently, are costing the Connecticut taxpayers millions of dollars, $10 million in the State of Connecticut for testing. This should be cut from the budget. A moratorium should be put on the SBAC and SAT for the next fiscal year. Common Core -- Common Core's band-aid, the Scientific Research Based Interventions or SRBI, have increased our Special Education costs dramatically as you probably know from your own school board budgets. If we did this, this would improvement across the state.

Clearly the statement heard most since this 2019 session has been we have spending problem, which needs to be remedied. This would effective -- effectively improve the state of Connecticut and not the creation of more study groups as proposed here.

Finally, our elected representatives should read the Connecticut Constitution to see where improving
municipalities or regions exists. It simply does not. Please vote NO on this Bill. Thank you.

REP. MCCARTHY VAHEY (133RD): Thank you. Are there questions from members of the Committee? Seeing none, thank you for your time today.

ANNE MANUSKEY: Thank you.

REP. MCCARTHY VAHEY (133RD): Next is Representative Meskers who is accompanied by Howard Richman to be followed by Ernestine Halloway. Welcome.

REP. MESKERS (150TH): Welcome and thank you and good afternoon to our Chair, our Co-Chair, Representative McCarthy-Vahey, to our Ranking Members, Representative Champagne and Representative Zawistowski. I'm speaking to you today as a newly-elected Representative to the House and as a 15 or 16 year member of the Representative Town Meeting of Greenwich, Connecticut and for the first time in my life I'm surprised to be standing shoulder-to-shoulder with a tax collector. I think it probably surprised all of us at different points in time. I'm speaking regarding Section 15 in regards to the Election and Appointment of Tax Collectors in Bill 7192. I would humbly request that we consider an amendment of "may" to shall in the appointment of tax collector. Currently in Connecticut we've had a discussion, rather Jonathan has, whose right or wrong on the 77 or 80 members. I think we're in discussion on whether there was 77 or 80 members of the 169 tax collectors that are currently elected. In either case we're dealing with a number of about 45 percent in the elected governments of Connecticut and given the jobs and roles and duties of tax collector we've currently allowed the municipalities or the governing bodies to make that decision as to whether the position or elected or appointed. I think I would strongly suggest that we continue that
tradition. I'm going to turn it over to Howard Richman, my tax collector. Thanks Howard.

REP. MCCARTHY VAHEY (133RD): Welcome.

HOWARD RICHMAN: Welcome Madam Chair and thank you Steven Meskers, my State Representative. My name is Howard Richman. My name is Howard Richman. I am the elected Tax Collector of the Town of Greenwich and as Steve said, I am speaking in opposition of HB 7192 specifically Section 15, which calls for the sunsetting of elected Tax Collectors.

I'm also in my first term with Steve as Tax Collector in Greenwich. I was elected in 2017 on the second try. I ran in 2015 and being defeated, so I came back.

My first career spanned 35 years in corporate America where I took my job very seriously. I take my current job as Tax Collector very seriously as well. And I think if you check with the Greenwich delegation, obviously Meskers and Representatives Camillo, Floren, and Senator Bergstein, I believe they will confirm that I do take this job professionally.

This proposed legislation does not carry out CTX, OPM or the Governor’s office goal of making a tax collecting a profession. If enacted the hiring of Tax Collectors would be done by a local municipal board, either Finance Board or Board of Selectman. And the municipality would be under no restraint and could appoint a person who is a member of the controlling political party regardless of tax collection experience. There would be no requirement to retain the current Tax Collector who may have achieved or is in the process of achieving CCMC certification. All 77 elected Tax Collectors could be gone. And I think it was pointed out
before, of the 77 or the 70, but we'll go with 77; 70 of those are already certified. I am one of the 7 since I am in my first term I've already completed courses one and two and I'm starting three, so I'm on the way to becoming certified.

There is an advantage of having an elected Tax Collector. They are not subject to internal municipal pressure. Their jobs cannot be threatened by other town employees or municipal boards. There have been instances where an appointed Tax Collector has been asked to waive interest for a town official putting the collector in an untenable position because 1) waiving interest would violate state statute and 2) not waiving interest might put this appointed collector’s job at risk or in jeopardy as that or other town officials might have influence on who occupies the Tax Collector position.

You are all elected. Elected positions are important for government to function properly. I believe you'll understand the importance of voter choice. If this Bill is enacted in its current form, obviously section 15, then 77 municipalities and thousands of voters in the State of Connecticut will be deprived of choice. Power will be taken away from the electorate and concentrated in the hands of a few people. Please do not require the Tax Collectors be appointed. Thank you for your time.

REP. MCCARTHY VAHEY (133RD): Thank you very much for making the long trip up here to the Capital to be with us today. Are there questions? Representative Delnicki.

REP. DELNICKI (14TH): Thank you, Madam Chair and thank you for your comments there. For the record, the town I represent, South Windsor an appointed Tax Collector but it raises an interesting -- your
commentary raises an interesting point about the ability to have the tax payers empowered if they thought that somebody was being overly zealous or wasn't doing their job to be replaced at an election.

HOWARD RICHMAN: Yes.

REP. DELNICKI (14TH): So can you just speak on your own opinions on that pertaining to that concept?

HOWARD RICHMAN: Well again, I think -- it's -- you know one of the -- a wise politician said to me, don't worry about the politics when you're getting reelected. If you've done your job the politics will take care of themselves. And I'm -- I'm actually in the minority party in my town and I did win for this position and again, it's up to the voters to decide next November, assuming we still are on a ballot as to whether or not I've done a good job for the town and I think that is extremely important to have the voters have that say.

REP. DELNICKI (14TH): Follow-up question. I'm assuming that in the Town Charter it calls for the Tax Collector to be elected, is that correct?

HOWARD RICHMAN: Yes, that's correct.

REP. DELNICKI (14TH): So then to change that, that would be directly going and flying in the face of home rule; is that correct?

HOWARD RICHMAN: I believe so, yes.

REP. DELNICKI (14TH): And that would be change of the Charter without the approval of the people that live in the community?

HOWARD RICHMAN: Yes. And we have researched this also beforehand and in Greenwich you would have to go in front of the Board of Assessment and Taxation,
which is the Finance Board and then go to the Representative Town Meeting which is the 230 people and then go on the ballot and give the voters the choice whether they want it to be that position appointed or elected.

REP. DELNICKI (14TH): So then you would not want to see the concept of home rule, especially in this area undermined by whatever comes of the Commission?

HOWARD RICHMAN: Correct. And just to bring up one other item. I'm willing to throw the dice because again, you know if it's appointed I might get appointed. There's no guarantee I get reelected, but I'm willing to throw the dice and run for reelection again as I think all the other Tax Collectors are, based on what we have done in our job and the what the voters think.

REP. DELNICKI (14TH): Well thank you for your comments and coming here today. It's a long ride, huh?

HOWARD RICHMAN: Thank you, Representative. Yeah it is from Greenwich, yeah.

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

REP. MCCARTHY VAHEY (133RD): Thank you, Representative Delnicki. Representative Kokoruda.

REP. KOKORUDA (101ST): Thank you for being -- thank you for being here. I represent -- both my towns have Tax Collectors that are hired, you know I guess you call it appointed but they go through a competitive process. Do you have to run every two years?

HOWARD RICHMAN: Yep, it's every two years in Greenwich.
REP. KOKORUDA (101ST): Okay. And then I should know this, do Tax Collectors have certain certifications they need to have?

HOWARD RICHMAN: Yes. So the Connecticut Tax Collectors Association has the four -- has the certification program to become a certified Connecticut Municipal Collector. It's basically -- it's over either or two or three period. It's four courses spanning from usually (inaudible - 03:04:00) and then there's a final exam which is a separate entity and then the state, I believe it's state statute that says you must be in -- in working in a Tax Collector office for three years. So in theory I could complete in two, get reelected, pass the final but I'm not actually certified for another year.

REP. KOKORUDA (101ST): And so someone who did not have -- was not in this program, hasn't even started, it, would not be eligible to be on the ballot for this petition?

HAROLD RICHMAN: Oh, no, no, no, no. Any -- anybody can be on the ballot for this position. What you know, what I think we've seen again is with the 70 elected who are certified and the 7 more, you know I think you've seen the professionalism come to that -- yes, you want to be -- there's no reason to not be certified. My one -- two of my instructors were here. One is still here. I have learned so much from the first two courts, that it makes me a better Tax Collector, so to get elected I don't understand the mentality of anybody who would not want to go to school. I tell my friends I go to Tax Collector school. But that makes me a better Tax Collector and so I think it's -- it's obviously a tremendous program and I don't see why anybody would not want to do that.
REP. KOKORUDA (101ST): So you can -- when you became a Tax Collector last year --


REP. KOKORUDA (101ST): Okay. You had no training and you started the training at that point?

HOWARD RICHMAN: That's correct. I liked to think as I said in the beginning of my comments, I had 35 years of corporate America training, which I think was worth something. But no, I had no training as a Tax Collector. But when I got elected I said I'm going to learn and I'm going to learn as quickly as I can. And actually for myself it took -- I really felt like I -- it's a seven month learning curve I think. Because you know you have your two collection seasons. You have July and January but January is always smaller than the July so everybody told me, wait until you get through July. I said, okay fine. And I went from you know, January through July. By the end of July with going to the certification -- certification courses and experience and learning and asking questions, then I felt I was a really a Tax Collector.

REP. KOKORUDA (101ST): Okay. Thank -- thank you very much.

HOWARD RICHMAN: You're welcome. Thank you.

REP. MCCARTHY VAHEY (133RD): Thank you Representative Kokoruda. Are there other questions from members? I have one. I am from Fairfield, up the road from you and we also have an appointed, both appointed positions. And when I was listening to the conversation, which is very interesting, it occurs to me that in some respects in terms of recall, in an election you have to wait two years and though I do have that opportunity as a voter whereas if there were a situation or an incident
with an appointed position, the Chief Elected Official or whoever the appointing authority would be able to take swifter action in that regard. Can you speak to that at all?

HOWARD RICHMAN: Logically it makes sense. I can only speak for the town of Greenwich and in the town of Greenwich Charter there is a power grip so if the Tax Collector is not performing their duties that they can -- I don't remember exactly, but they can be replaced or I think the Finance Board can suspend their salary. I think that's what that process is. So there is a protection in Greenwich. I can't speak for any other towns.

REP. MCCARTHY VAHEY (133RD): Thank you for that. It is an interesting issue to ponder and certainly we want to be able to do what's going to work best in the long run and it sounds like it's different in different communities, so thank you.

HOWARD RICHMAN: It is and we all know you're appointed Tax Collector very well because he is very active in the Association.

REP. MCCARTHY VAHEY (133RD): Well, we're lucky to have him. So thank you for being with us here today.

HOWARD RICHMAN: Thank you, Madam Chair. Thank you to the -- to the panel.

REP. MCCARTHY VAHEY (133RD): Next on our list is Ernestine Halloway and I'll -- I'll have you reintroduce yourself when you come up here; followed by Tanya Hughes. Welcome.

REVEREND ERNESTINE HALLOWAY: My name is Reverend Ernestine Halloway. I represent CTRA, Connecticut Republican Assembly. I'm their current clergy. I also represent Refuse Simple Council of Churches.
I'm a community advocate so that means I represent urban cities, the inner city. I think the Governor is a monster. I think the programs --

REP. MCCARTHY VAHEY (133RD): Reverend Halloway.

REVEREND ERNESTINE HALLOWAY: I'm sorry. I'll clean it up.

REP. MCCARTHY VAHEY (133RD): May I -- I'm going to let you continue but I'd ask that in the Committee that we speak not personally -- no personal attacks.

REVEREND ERNESTINE HALLOWAY: Well, you didn't let me finish.

REP. MCCARTHY VAHEY (133RD): I will let you finish.

REVEREND ERNESTINE HALLOWAY: Yes. I think his program is disastrous. He's going to destroy our cities and I'm telling everybody from these organizations in the city, maybe we need to start saying -- we need to investigate what COG is. What is CIR? All these names. MOP. We need to know. I don't agree with 70 people getting together that has never been in my town, doesn't know the demographic of our town, doesn't know anything about our school system and they're making plans for us. Who the heck are they? We voted you guys in. We didn't vote them in. Well at least I didn't vote for Ned Lamont. I'm very angry. I heard some stuff that I've never heard before. You're going to violate our Charter. I don't think so. You won't be violating Meriden's Charter. Not while I'm on the watch. I think it's wrong. So you change the verbiage. Now we don't want to put everybody happy-go-lucky together. We want to change it because people are unhappy. Well guess what? I wasn't unhappy until I listened to this mess today. And I'm telling you, we put you guys in those seats, we going to get you out if you vote for this. It's not
fair. It's not fair at all. I'm very angry and I'm not an angry person. I've very disappointed.
Nobody talked to us. I listened to him talk about all those boards. You got one parent; 169 towns, one parent? Really? How does that work? Who picks that parent? I'm an appointed official of my town. Who gives them a right to decide who should be appointed and who shouldn't? We vote for people. So you going to go over what the people voted in a Charter. We put that Charter together so if we want to open our Charter and change it whenever we want to, then we can. Nobody has the right to tell a town, either you accept something and if you don't there's a penalty. People go to jail for that. You threaten somebody and tell them if you don't do this or we going to do that. That's totalitarian rule. I thought was the United States of America. I thought that we had Constitution. I thought we had laws that we had to go by. What this gentleman behind e said, that works for Governor Lamont, you're eroding our municipalities and it's wrong. So you started with the police department, you went to the fire department, now you're going to do our schools. Where are the people at? And then you called us creatures. You called us creatures. That is so disrespectful and rude. I don't think so. I'm an advocate and I'm going to go to Bridgeport and I'm going to go to Meriden and I'm going to go to Hartford and I'm going to visit them and I'm going to make sure that they fight against this. So if you pass this law, I'm telling you sure enough as grits is groceries, you pass this law you're going too.

REP. MCCARTHY VAHEY (133RD): And if you could summarize, that would great. Is that it?

REVEREND ERNESTINE HALLOWAY: I don't think it's fair. What happened to we the people? And I -- and
I want everybody that's watching that should have been here today, he called us creatures. I don't think you can get no lower than that. We are people that appointed this government. Ugh.

REP. MCCARTHY VAHEY (133RD): Thank you for your testimony today.

REVEREND ERNESTINE HALLOWAY: I'm done.

REP. MCCARTHY VAHEY (133RD): Are there -- could you stay here? We have some questions for you. Representative Rojas.

REP. ROJAS (9TH): Thank you, Madam Chair. Thank you, Ms. Halloway for your testimony. I didn't catch the first half of it, I caught the second half.

REVEREND ERNESTINE HALLOWAY: My name is Reverend Halloway. I earned it.

REP. ROJAS (9TH): Reverend Halloway, sure.

REVEREND ERNESTINE HALLOWAY: Thank you.

REP. ROJAS (9TH): You did this -- the piece about creatures. I don't you know, not that the Undersecretary needs defense from me but I don't think he was referring to people as being creatures. He was referring to a legal structure in which towns and cities actually are authorized to do what they do via the State of Connecticut. I think that's the point.

REVEREND ERNESTINE HALLOWAY: I know the law very well. And I'm offended by that -- what they getting ready to put in. I'm really offended. You didn't ask the people. The people are the ones who elect you. What do we think about this process? You know that's what wrong with it in the city, their schools. A bunch of people got together and decided
they thought that they knew what was best. So they implemented common core. Didn't ask the people 'cause we would have told you. So then what the Governor did was Malloy, he snuck it in under the terminology called crossroads and by the time people realized common core was in, it was already too late and they done already took the money and bought into the Kool-Aid. My problem is what he said, if they don't take the money or do what they say do we can hold up their grant.

REP. ROJAS (9TH): Yeah, those are incentives and if you choose -- let me -- (Crosstalk).

REVEREND ERNESTINE HALLOWAY:: What happens if you don't want these?

REP. MCCARTHY VAHEY (133RD): Reverend Halloway if you'll please let the Representative finish.

REP. ROJAS (9TH): A lot of our government is structured around providing particular incentives to get people to behave in certain ways, so it's an incentive right? So towns can choose to do something or not and the incentive -- they can be incentivized or not to get state funding for something or not.

REVEREND ERNESTINE HALLOWAY:: So what you're saying is, if we don't go along, because this is what I got from him and the gentleman that came before him. If we don't go along with what they're saying, you can hold up the grant. Because somebody asked that question and what he said was, yeah we got the power to do that. I heard what he said.

REP. ROJAS (9TH): The opposite is also true. The towns can choose to pay for something on their own if they don't want to go along with the framework that the state provides. Is that -- is that not true?
REVEREND ERNESTINE HALLOWAY: Yes.

REP. ROJAS (9TH): Okay.

REVEREND ERNESTINE HALLOWAY: But that's not what he said.

REP. ROJAS (9TH): I -- I'm not -- I'm talking with you right now.

REVEREND ERNESTINE HALLOWAY: Okay.

REP. ROJAS (9TH): I'm not worried about the Undersecretary said before, you know? You can have that conversation --

REVEREND ERNESTINE HALLOWAY: Well I am.

REP. ROJAS (9TH): And you can have that conversation with him. I'm having a conversation with you now.

REVEREND ERNESTINE HALLOWAY: No, actually I'm going to have the conversation with the people 'cause I was appointed.

REP. ROJAS (9TH): And you keep making references to about we the people. This is not a direct democracy, it's a representative democracy, right? Didn't you elect people to make those decisions?

REVEREND ERNESTINE HALLOWAY: I don't think you guys representing us well.

REP. ROJAS (9TH): I mean how would you operationalize me going back to the 24,000 people I represent and getting some kind of consensus from them?

REVEREND ERNESTINE HALLOWAY: Well then, this is what I'm going to ask you because you said something too.

REP. ROJAS (9TH): Yeah.
REVEREND ERNESTINE HALLOWAY: Suppose your town, your people in your town don't want it and that's what you want. So how does that work?

REP. ROJAS (9TH): Well, I will make a decision that I think is in the best interest of my district, getting feedback from people who are for something, people who are against it and if they're not happy with that collectively, in two years they can elect me out, right? That's the process.

REVEREND ERNESTINE HALLOWAY: I think that's what they should do.

REP. ROJAS (9TH): Well that's fine.

REP. MCCARTHY VAHEY (133RD): And again Reverend Halloway I would ask that we just stick with the issues as opposed to the people.

REVEREND ERNESTINE HALLOWAY: That is an issue. And I do speak for the people and I do speak for the urban inner city 'cause that's my job. And I guarantee you, if they don't understand this law, when I get finished putting up the videos about what happened today and getting it off line, I think that it's -- I just -- I just think that the municipalities are going to suffer under this establishment and I think they're going to realize they made a big mistake. It's going to be a costly mistake but in two to four years, seats are going to be up and we'll get to operate in that democracy that I don't see anymore. And when I begin to hear everything that he said and everything that you all said in the questions that you put forth to ask him, some of you, some of you were just as scared as we were. I feel that it's a violation. You -- they're going to use you guys to go over our Charter because it's a tedious process? That's what makes democracy so great. That's what makes us United States.
That's what makes us different from any other country, that we, the people can say we don't want this. We put this Charter in place so that you can't do exactly what he described what they want to do. I have a problem with that. And if you don't, it's okay. It's your freedom of choice. What you're planning to do to our schools and to the small towns. You knew the Federal government had a program that didn't work. You guys put a Band-aid on it and then you realized the Band-aid is not holding the problem so now you want to put everybody together. Everybody's district is not a bad school. The inner cities, yes it's a horrible program. Yes, it doesn't work so why didn't he take his program if it was so great, put it in a pilot program, try it in one of the inner cities to see if it works before you start implementing this in 169 towns?

REP. MCCARTHY VAHEY (133RD): Representative Rojas.

REP. ROJAS (9TH): I just wanted to thank you for coming up to testify and engaging in the process.

REVEREND ERNESTINE HALLOWAY: Thank you.

REP. MCCARTHY VAHEY (133RD): Thank you, Representative Rojas. Are there other members of the Committee? Reverend Halloway, before you go I just want to point out a couple of points of fact in terms of the two bodies that were referenced in 7192, ACIR is one and I know we use alphabet soup, which is a body that currently exists already.

REVEREND ERNESTINE HALLOWAY: I know.

REP. MCCARTHY VAHEY (133RD): And the COGs, which are made, the Councils of Government are made up of the Chief Elected Officials of all of the municipalities and in those COGs they each have equal vote and equal voice. Just a point of
clarification. Thank you for being here with us today.

REVEREND ERNESTINE HALLWAY: I'm going to say this to you. If I thought they had a -- if it was -- it's just like I'm saying, I got a classroom and I got a bunch of kids and they say to me, okay we want marshmallows. We're going to have marshmallows. I say, okay let's take a vote. It's 70 of you all so let's take a vote on marshmallows. So you mean to tell me one is not going to get left out? I listened to what he said about Bridgeport. Is Bridgeport going to get more money than everybody else? No, we signed an agreement with FITCH so they don't do that. But guess what? Bridgeport is a larger town than most everything, so they should have a little bit of extra money. So I listened to what he said, and I'm going to tell you what it sounds like to me. It sounds like our government is becoming a bully. And you're bullying municipalities. I heard what everybody else said. I think they're becoming a bully and I think the people of Connecticut better wake up and they better rise up and they better start fighting. You're not only going to tax us to death, you're going to regionalize us to death and then you're going to tell us that if you don't like it, it can possibly hold up this grant, that grant so what we need to do is tell the Governor, no you can't have our taxes from cars. We're going to take that money and we're going to build our cities and our towns and do it without you and see how they survive.

Thank you for listening to me. I listened to you and I need to tell you, it breaks my heart that we sound -- we sound like a third-world country.

REP. MCCARTHY VAHEY (133RD): Thank you for your time today, Reverend Halloway. Next on the list is
Tanya Hughes to be followed by Deborah Heim. Welcome.

TANYA HUGHES: Thank you. Good afternoon Representative McCarthy Vahey, Ranking Members and members of the Planning and Development Committee. My name is Tanya Hughes. I am the Executive Director of the Commission on Human Rights and Opportunities. With me today is Cheryl Sharp, CHRO’s Deputy Director. And we are here because the CHRO opposes the passage of SB 1081.

In 2015, this legislature removed the statutory exemption granted to municipalities from contract compliance statutes that require minority and small business set asides in state financed contracts. This was to correct the many years of lost revenue to small businesses and minority businesses who have historically been excluded from the state contracting pie. Applying the statutory requirement to municipalities levels the playing field while requiring contractors involved in state assisted municipal public works contracts, where they exceed $50,000 and to make good faith efforts to include small and minority businesses in performance. By raising the state funded dollar amount from $50,000 to $500,000 the effect will be obvious and immediate and many businesses will be deprived of potential business on state funded public works projects eliminating equal opportunity requirements made in connection with these contracts. Moreover, it will eliminate inclusion the state's nondiscrimination language and the contracts funded with state dollars. Municipalities should adhere to the same requirements that apply to the state and state assisted contracts and should follow state money.

The CHRO believes that helping small contractors, minority business enterprises, and businesses owned
by individuals with disabilities promotes economic opportunities across the state and reduces discrimination -- reduces discrimination and we've seen evidence of this. Small businesses and minority businesses who had been deprived of contracting opportunities for a very long time and who are now benefiting from the set-aside program, must be provided with the opportunity to participate in state assisted contracting. So we thank you for the opportunity to testify before you today, and both of us are here to answer any questions that you have for us.

REP. MCCARTHY VAHEY (133RD): Thank you for being with us today. Are there questions from members of the Committee? Representative Arnone.

REP. ARNONE (58TH): So I in reading this, that's another stumbling block with this Bill and I agree. I don't see the issue for municipalities to hold down to the $55,000 threshold. So I appreciate you coming in and letting us all hear the testimony on this. I think it's something that definitely needs to be looked at in this Bill and thank you again for testifying.

TANYA HUGHES: Thank you.

REP. MCCARTHY VAHEY (133RD): Thank you, Representative Arnone. Are there other questions? Representative Kokoruda.

REP. KOKORUDA (101ST): Thank you, Madam Chair. I actually unfortunately don't agree with you. I think a lot of small towns have just stopped doing projects because of these setbacks and all these different hold backs and whatever. So I think really where there are towns that are getting very little state money for everything else, when they finally get a little bit of the pie and a very
little bit, we put strings on them. So I just can't really support. I think this is a step to really help municipalities and I have to say, it's good for me to hear you being here today in favor, saying some positive about small businesses because in the past I've talked to my constituents that are small business owners. They quite often have looked at your Commission as a predator and they quite often have really felt at the end when it was all settled without going to court, that they're actually -- they felt almost like they'd been extorted. So it's good to hear that you sometimes hear the other side, but coming from a small town, working every day with small businesses, there's a lot of work we need to do to support them. I -- I love the fact that when we run for office we all run that we want to help small businesses. We get up here, we forget it. But this right here looks like it -- it just takes -- gives an opportunity for small towns to get in the game to actually get some projects done, to watch a project that should be done, be done -- you know should be done in nine months, take five years because they can't afford it because of this stuff. I think we've got to start working with our small towns. We can't just penalize them. We're not in the big cities with the million dollar grants. It doesn't happen to us so -- when we do project so, I want to thank you for your testimony. I'm sorry I feel that way about small businesses but I can tell you story after story of a constituent that paid -- didn't go to court, but paid because he was so afraid, even though he said he did nothing wrong, he wasn't even involved; he was so afraid of what's threatened. One of my constituents actually went and refinanced his home to pay those fees and that's what we've got to stop doing up here. Thank you.
REP. MCCARTHY VAHEY (133RD): Thank you, Representative Kokoruda. Representative Arnone.

REP. ARNONE (58TH): Could you just -- could you elaborate a little bit on what's required under that -- under the state statute for affirmative action? They just have to have an affirmative action plan, and how much -- what a financial, if there is any financial burden on the towns to have these plans in place?

CHERYL SHARP: So it's -- we're of the opinion that the requirements --

REP. MCCARTHY VAHEY (133RD): Excuse me. If you don't mind repeating your name for the record that would be wonderful.

CHERYL SHARP: Oh sure, I'm sorry. My name is Cheryl Sharp and I'm the Deputy Director at the Connecticut Commission on Human Rights and Opportunities and a Commission Attorney. With respect to the set-aside program, as an enforcement agency we enforce the law which requires that there be affirmative action on the state-funded portion of a municipal public works contract. So it's not on the entire contract and we've seen -- seen some testimony that is referencing city dollars. That is not what the set-aside program that we administer, oversee or enforce requires. And these are the requirements, because the cost I'm not understanding -- I'm assuming that what was being referenced earlier was maybe a complaint of discrimination that had been filed, which is a whole another process that is not the set-aside program. So first I'll address the set-aside program.

What the statute requires that is if there is a contract between $50,000 to $500,000 of state dollars that have been giving municipality for a
project that there be a set-aside plan submitted by the contractor to the Commission. What is included in that set-aside plan and what the statute talks about is an affirmative action and equal opportunity nondiscrimination commitment on the project. It's an equal opportunity requirement that AAEEO designation be placed on the literature that goes out to the public so in their advertisements and solicitations that that contractor make it clear to those who they are soliciting from that they are an affirmative action and equal opportunity employer. They agree to provide this notice to labor unions. They are stating to labor unions that they are committed to anti-discrimination. They agree to post notices of nondiscrimination to their employees and to applicants for jobs with their company. The contractor also agrees to comply with the sectorial statutes related to nondiscrimination, that they make their books, records, accounts, procedures and employment practices known so that we can, as the state agency who is responsible and have a mission of eliminating discrimination, that the business is being carried out in a nondiscriminatory manner. And that their employment practices are not discriminatory. It also requires good faith efforts to employ minority business enterprises and the definition of minority business enterprises includes woman-owned businesses, ethnic minority-owned businesses and disabled-owned businesses. The purpose of the contract compliance law was to turn over the dollar in the State of Connecticut so that we set aside a portion of state dollars, the hundreds of millions of dollars that is spent yearly on construction, that we set aside 25 percent for small Connecticut-owned companies. So when testified that we believe that we're contributing to economic development in the state and helping small
businesses in the state through the administrational program, that is what we're referring to.

Then the statute indicates and makes very clear that 25 percent of that or 6.25 percent has to be set aside for ethnic minorities, woman-owned and disabled owned businesses. So the set-aside plan that has to be prepared by contractors; and I just want to make this other point, that it also makes it so that a contractor has to hold the subcontractors that they're contracting with accountable to not discriminate, to offer equal opportunity because there are two issues here, right? There's equity and equality. Are we on the same playing field? Are we turning out state dollar over more than one time in the State of Connecticut and building our states economy or are we allowing you know, big business to come in from out of state and take some of the state funding. So this is why our testimony is what it is,

To address what I think was a reference to a complaint of discrimination being filed because we also have enforcement over complaints of discrimination in employment, housing, credit transactions and in places of public accommodation. Those are individual complaints filed by the public who are alleging that they were discriminated against or treated differently than similarly situated individuals. Those are disport treatment plans that can be filed with our agency. We look at those on a case-by-case basis and apply the legal theories that are available under the civil rights laws. And so we do have mediation as a part of our process, but there is no -- we have no authority to force any respondent to settle a complaint of discrimination whether it is a contracting practices complaint or a complaint as I described under those -- one of those other four areas. And so, while
everyone is not going to be happy with an outcome if they you know, a complaint filed against them. And most people feel that they don't have any ill will or ill intent toward someone because of a protected class basis. But unfortunately discrimination still happens. We get you know; thousands of complaints filed a year. Not every complaint that's filed is credible but as the enforcement agency, the way the statutes have been designed and enacted by you guys, the legislature, our position, our jurisdiction is to enforce those laws. So I hope that that clarifies all the issues that were brought up.

REP. ARNONE (58TH): Yes it does. And over my ten year experience as a counselor in my local district, we never had any issues moving a project along. It's usually anything other than engineering or parts and materials that drag these projects on. So simply not the way most businesses do business and should do business. And again, that's hurting this Bill in here and in my case and again, thank you for testifying.

CHERYL SHARP: Can I just add --

REP. ARNONE (58TH): Yes, please.

CHERYL SHARP: Because I think that there's a lack. I just want to put some clarification to this. When a plan is filed with us and the statute says that we have a you know, certain number of days, 60 days to analyze that plan, we have put into place a policy that if we don't analyze the plan within 120 days that the 2 percent, because that is the only thing that would -- the only consequence, right? That we have any authority or power over, that 2 percent is withheld on a project a month. But after 120 days if we have not done our review, that 2 percent is released, whether it's a municipal project or whether it is a state project or you know, solely
state project. So we're not holding up the construction or buildings and we're not keeping small businesses out of the arena of bidding on projects and -- and we don't hold the 2 -- the 2 percent. But by statute the 2 percent is held back by the awarding agency or awarding municipality until a contractor gets an approved affirmative action plan or until 120 days has passed and we have not issued a -- our analysis. So we're definitely not holding up the process but I understand that there was some confusion regarding that which is why I will lastly state that we went around to COGs and provided training at the request of COGs to understand our process and also we put a robust instruction on line. It has all of the forms on our website, ct.gov\choo and it explains how the process works and all the forms that need to be filled out. We also offer a monthly TA session, technical assistance for individuals who may have questions or don't understand how to file or complete a set-aside plan. So we have put to -- in place a lot of procedures and processes to make this very user friendly because we want small business to thrive. We want minority businesses to thrive and we want our process as a state agency to not be bureaucratic and cumbersome. So that -- and we've done that because we've heard the concerns the businesses and we try to address them.

REP. ARNONE (58TH): Thank you.

REP. MCCARTHY VAHEY (133RD): Thank you, Representative Arnone. Are there other questions from members of the Committee? If not, thank you very much for your answers and explanations.

CHERY SHARP: Thank you.

REP. MCCARTHY VAHEY (133RD): Next we have Deborah Heim to be followed by Representative Lavielle.
DEBORAH HEIM: First of all I want to thank you all for having me speak. My name is Deborah Heim. I am the Tax Collector for the town of Monroe. I'm currently elected. It's an elected position. I'm currently appointed until the next elected. Prior to that I was elected 10 years and I have 10 years and then I was 18 years as an appointed in another town and I'm going back to an elected position. Just to let you know, there really is no guarantee that the Tax Collector is more professional or qualified. I've seen appointed Tax Collectors that had no more qualifications than an elected Tax Collector. And the elected -- being elected I had the authority to do whatever -- within statute to do within the office. As appointed I had a lot of control by the elective governing parties. They would tell me, you know instruct me how to do my tax sales, who to hire, what to do, which was not always beneficial to the taxpayer.

There is a big cost factor between elected and appointed. Historically elected Tax Collectors paid a lot less than appointed Tax Collectors. And also I've seen that when it has gone to appointed position that the union wants these positions in the bargaining unit, which also increases cost and benefits to the town.

Elected Tax Collectors answer to the taxpayers which causes a lot better tax -- customer service to the taxpayers because we have to answer and address their problems where in other situations being appointed, it can go up to the next level or whatever. We are the -- we have to answer and address the problems there. It's also nice to know when they come in to you, they can put a smile to the face and everything else. It's not changing or anything else and we can solve their problems and
they know they can come directly to us because we're out there campaigning and answering to them.

Also it would involve Charter changes because in their Charter it says that we will have an elected Tax Collector and that would be another cost into the towns.

And another thing I wanted to address is on the regionalization, we had a health department in our town. I was on Council then because I was appointed in another town so I was on a Council and we were in with another community as a regional and the other town pulled out of the -- the health district and we had to hurry up and scurry to make our own or join another health district. A lot of things -- we got a few outcries from the residents in the area that they had to go to a community which was several towns out to get their permits and everything else. We also found with using the inspectors and everything that they would only be in our area on certain days, which a lot of our builders and everything were not really happy about because if they missed that permitting cycle, they would have to wait until the next. If there was a problem with the inspection and had to have a reinspection, it would put out the things another week. And we also found that it was more cost effective for us to have a region -- have the -- that health department right into our town and they can come in and ask the questions and get them addressed. So the residents were very happy with that. Getting their permits right away and getting their inspections on a timely basis.

And I think what we should do is -- I'm not telling you what to do but I would be suggested that you know, look at the major impacts and implications that these will have on towns, the costs and
everything else. Because sometimes what it looks nice in the long run does not always happen. And to make these mandatory at all, all the sudden is not good. And thank you very much for your time.

SENATOR CASSANO (4TH): Thank you very much Ms. Heim. Anyone?

REP. DELNICKI (14TH): Thank you, Mr. Chair and thank you for coming forward with your testimony. Has there every been any complaints in Unity about the fact that it's an elected position as opposed to an appointed position?

DEBORAH HEIM: No, not that I'm aware of. Everybody has seen -- I mean they can come in, they can talk. I have an open door policy so they can come in. They get resolve the thing. I would tell them you know, I've never had a problem. They have been -- they have always been very receptive and I've -- when I was elected in this community, a few times I was unopposed and people are very happy now that I'm back. They're very happy to see me.

REP. DELNICKI (14TH): Glad to hear that. Your election or the election of a Tax Collector as part of the home rule, part of the Charter of the town?

DEBORAH HEIM: That is correct.

REP. DELNICKI (14TH): So has there ever been a call to open the Charter to change that?

DEBORAH HEIM: They had a Charter change, oh, a few years back that talked about it but they felt that that position should be an elected.

REP. DELNICKI (14TH): So your community looked at the issue, discussed it and made the decision not to change it because it was working?

DEBORAH HEIM: Not to change that.
REP. DELNICKI (14TH): Is that a fair statement?

DEBORAH HEIM: That's a very fair statement.

REP. DELNICKI (14TH): And I'm trying to understand why we would want to overrule that?

DEBORAH HEIM: I have no idea. That's why I'm here testifying today.

REP. DELNICKI (14TH): Thank you for your testimony --

DEBORAH HEIM: Thank you.

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

SENATOR CASSANO (4TH): Representative Zawistowski.

REP. ZAWISTOWSKI (61ST): Thank you, Mr. Chair. Thank you for coming in today. One of my towns had an elected Tax Collector until probably about five or six years ago and we switched over to appointed. And I just really think that there is a benefit in having a Tax Collector who actually lives in the town because our appointed one now doesn't even live in town. So you know, having a little skin in the game is always nice.

DEBORAH HEIM: And I -- and I'll be honest with you. I've had phone calls when I was elected at my home and you can get that hometown thing I have going to elderly people that I know, picked up tax payments at their home where I would -- but just you know, being appointed I didn't have that opportunity because I -- but -- like I said, people care. They come in and see you where the appoint -- when I was appointed it was more, I hate to say this, you know a job type thing that -- very impersonal.

REP. ZAWISTOWSKI (61ST): Did you -- you kind of implied that as appointed that you might be getting
additional pressure from whoever the appointing authority?

DEBORAH HEIM: I -- I could give you an example. We have -- when we had -- before we went to a Mayor form of government we had a Town Manager. He pretty well let you know, as long as everything -- the collection rates were fine, I did a tax sale and a tax sale is under state statute and there's a process that has to be followed where the amounts that we have to -- we charge back the taxpayers the amount that we expend. So the amounts are very nominal. The -- when we went to Mayor form of government the next Mayor turned around and said we'll do -- we are doing a lien sale. No option. Which a lien sale was very effective also. Very non -- except that it takes the control out of the tax office and now puts it into a -- in an assignment position with somebody else. The next Mayor that was elected turned around and said, we're doing strict foreclosures and you're using this attorney firm and the amounts were -- were the attorneys crossed up. They're quite -- where a taxpayer could -- with the tax sale maybe be $500 with where using an attorney were up to $5,000. So now you have the burden, the person couldn't make the payments in the first place and now has an additional cost, $5,000. I also saw that people that had influence in the town was put off longer for the foreclosures, to have more time to pay where somebody with no influence the foreclosure was you know, sped up. Which I did not feel -- but I had no control over that. I mean it was the decision of the governing board at the time. So --

REP. ZAWISTOWSKI (61ST): Okay, thank --

DEBORAH HEIM: I mean there's pros and cons. I'm not saying that everything is perfect but I think
taking the rights away from the town, the taxpayers of the community is -- shouldn't be -- and also there's a large cross burden.

REP. ZAWISTOWSKI (61ST): Thank -- thank you for that. And one last question. I know the Assessors have certification levels and things like that. Do they have something like that for Tax Collectors?

DEBORAH HEIM: What's that, I'm sorry?

REP. ZAWISTOWSKI (61ST): Certifications at all?

DEBORAH HEIM: I am -- I'm certified for Tax Collector. I went for my certification right off. I worked in the tax office because -- before I became Tax Collector so I got my certification shortly after they got the -- the election -- the -- being elected. So -- but -- our -- but there is no qualification that says an appointed has to be. It is up to the town how they post that job. The job in my town that I just left says five years' experience or certified. And it says or equivalent, so it's up to interpretation of what that exactly means. And so it -- not necessarily appointed would have to be certified.

REP. ZAWISTOWSKI (61ST): Okay. Thank you very much. Thank you again for coming in.

DEBORAH HEIM: You're welcome. Thank you.

REP. ZAWISTOWSKI (61ST): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

SENATOR CASSANO (4TH): Thank you. Any other questions? Just a brief comment because it's -- I love the position of elected official. We've had a situation in a small town where if somebody was elected as a Tax Collector and didn't collect taxes, didn't record anything and so on and it was a -- thank God for the region, which kind of fixed things up for them but it was a disaster because there are
no qualifications when you run for office except signing up and announcing that you're going to run basically, unless it's a referendum or something like that and different things. But -- and so it was difficult. For a position so important for anybody just to come in who has never had the experience, the background that you have as an example is a -- was for this town a disaster. And you know the arguments, what does it mean to be qualified to run? It means that you sign the form, submitted the application and now you're on the ballot and that's what it means to be qualified in those cases. Some positions, and you wouldn't think of the Tax Collector but I think of it because I know the responsibilities behind that. I know what you have to do every day. I know what our office had to do when I was Mayor and it's not just anybody can run for that position. And it was unopposed by the way. (Laughing) So that's -- that's why I kind of -- in a small town in some cases and that's what you get and there's a consequence for that. I think we've got to do a better job of relaying to people how important the responsibilities are that a lot of our local town employees have that they just don't see, so. Thanks very much for your being here. Appreciate it.

DEBORAH HEIM: Thank you.


REP. LAVIELLE (143RD): Good afternoon Senator Cassano, Representative Zawistowski and everybody else. Before I start I want to say that the Governor's proposed amendment (inaudible - 03:49:32) are in response (inaudible - 03:49:34) although I
never had a chance in the Education Committee, (inaudible - 03:49:38) that section (inaudible - 03:49:41) and amendment is not actually (inaudible - 03:49:44) deals with fostering and (inaudible - 03:49:46) included with that goal (inaudible - 03:49:49) good outcomes. (inaudible - 03:49:51) use of government solutions (inaudible - 03:49:53) 21 says for the purpose (inaudible - 03:49:56) municipalities (inaudible - 03:49:58) it would facilitate (inaudible - 03:50:01) for example (inaudible - 03:50:04) tax assessment (inaudible - 03:50:06) 22 to 24 which (inaudible - 03:50:06). These sections would create (inaudible - 03:50:17) unless there be (inaudible - 03:50:17) for changing the configurations of school districts. The terms redistricting in schools consolidation are used repeatedly. And also noteworthy is the reference on page 22 of Governor Lamont's Budget Book, which was released in mid-February before any (inaudible - 03:50:34) comment on the Bill had been received. The reference to a school services and redistricting commission.

I have several concerns about this education portion of the Bill. One is that the focus of cost is work appears to be on cost savings and operational efficiencies with little or no consideration for the quality of education overall, which should be our -- always our primary concern when we -- when it comes to education.

Second, many school districts would like to share services and many, many have. A lot of them are very curious and eager to share services regarding special education for example. Often however, they're prevented from doing so because of costs, collective bargaining agreements or various mandates. There are also cases, and I do want to point one out. They're cases where statewide
legislation has passed to encourage sharing of services but progress hasn't been able to move forward because of the same factors. For example Governor Lamont has correctly regionally -- recently highlighted North Carolina's single statewide contract for school software. Well in 2017, we, this legislature passed a Bill, House Bill 7276, which became Public Act 17-2020 -- sorry, 17-220 that required the state to survey local and regional boards of education on their use of digital school management and reporting software with a view toward eventually providing a statewide option at no cost to districts. We wanted to make that language go further, to require the state to issue an RFP and then proceed to a contract, but the state's fiscal constraints wouldn't have allowed it and so we had to get rid of the fiscal note to pass the Bill. But that law is still there.

The Bill is silent. This is a third concern. The Bill is silent on the ultimate fate or purpose of the cost plan. And I think the Governor has said some things to clear that up but the Bill as it -- as it was and still is, would require legislative -- would require legislative approval to implemented, would require something from the Board of Education, the State Board. Would penalties for compliance -- noncompliance be in there? Is the plan simply an exercise in identifying voluntary opportunities for action by school districts. And I'm wrapping up.

One last concern. The uncertainty created by the silence on the purpose of the plan is exacerbated by the length of time, nearly two years, COST would have to deliver it. And knowing that the configuration of the school districts could change two or three years from now does not inspire confidence among perspective residents of Connecticut towns.
So in conclusion, I think the legislature has a role to play in identifying and eliminating barriers to voluntary consolidation and sharing of services but with a few exceptions that is not the thrust of this Bill. And therefore I'm having sort of a difficult time seeing what the reason for it actually is. Thank you very much for your thoughtful consideration and your indulgence.

SENATOR CASSANO (4TH): Thanks very much for your testimony. Are there questions? Representative Zawistowski.

REP. ZAWISTOWSKI (61ST): Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Thank you, Representative for squeaking out of the toll debate to come over here and talk about this Bill. The -- since we came in here we have received some amendments to the education portion of this Bill so some of -- some of what you've mentioned is a little better. What I do want to ask you is something that came up in this Bill as well. I don't know when you were going through it whether you noticed that ASIR is actually required to create a list of mandates every year and submit them to the Appropriations Committee and since I know that you are the Ranking Member on Appropriations I was wondering if you have ever seen this or if there's a way we could possibly get this.

REP. LAVIELLE (143RD): I just can't get away from this stuff, everywhere I go, can I? (Laughing) I have not see it. I have not seen it. I would very much like to see the last one that was delivered.

REP. ZAWISTOWSKI (61ST): Thank you. And I did send you an email to you earlier asking you if you had seen it (crosstalk).

REP. LAVIELLE (143RD): You did but I was -- as you -- as you pointed out, I was next door in the tolls
debate, which I still am. I'm actually a figment of your imagination, I'm still over there. (Laughing)

REP. ZAWISTOWSKI (61ST): But anyway, thank you -- thank you for coming in here and taking the time. I don't want to keep you too long if there's other questions. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

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

REP. ROJAS (9TH): Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Thank you Representative for being here. Back a couple of years ago when I chaired PNB we went through the whole exercise of consolidating our COGs and when we were working on that Bill, you expressed many of the same concerns that you expressed today, that there were going to be all these negative outcomes from doing what we were doing. Have those things been realized in your opinion?

REP. LAVIELLE (143RD): That's -- I'm trying to remember what they were because I --

REP. ROJAS (9TH): You were concerned that if we do this we're going to take tax dollars from your communities and send them to Bridgeport.

REP. LAVIELLE (143RD): Oh sure.

REP. ROJAS (9TH): There was -- you were going to lose local control, you were going to do all sorts of things. We went through that exercise.

REP. LAVIELLE (143RD): Yeah, I --

REP. ROJAS (9TH): You've got your COG here today. Were any of those negative things -- have they -- have they actually happened?

REP. LAVIELLE (143RD): Have they actually happened? No, no. No one has yet taken our property taxes. However, and let me -- let me -- let me amend that
because I don't like to use rhetoric. These are serious matters. And I think one of the -- one of the fears here that a lot of people from all over the state have expressed is that everyone pays income taxes and we understand. Those go up to the state and they are used anywhere in the state where the legislature deems they're needed. Same for the sales taxes. The property taxes and the way that we govern in the State of Connecticut are generally viewed as being -- they are for local use. And the hesitation and concern remains that there are many pieces of legislation this year that would in fact allow or cause property taxes to be used somewhere other than the place where they were raised. And notable among them is the proposal to have the towns pay for part of the normal cost of the teachers pension contributions that have been paid for by the state. But that's not a direct payment of property taxes but in fact the revenue that the towns raise from property taxes would be used for that because they don't have anywhere else they're getting revenue.

Another one is the proposal to use the car -- to stop the car tax at the municipal level and have that go up to the state level. All of that eventually impinges upon property taxes. That is still a concern of mine. It becomes a concern when there's an obligatory, as some of the municipal provisions that are still in this Bill, like the obligatory regionalization of Tax Assessors. What I am contending is that what would be tremendously useful because I know the state -- at least I can confer on you, you will be able to correct me if I'm wrong I'm sure, part of the purpose of discussing these things in the first place is to see if the towns can't do things that would cause them to need less money from the state, right? And that makes
sense, that makes sense to me. But some of those things the towns would have done anyway had they been able to. But if you're going to merge two dispatch operations and one of them pays one of them -- the people get more through their union contract than in the other one, that's going to cause a problem. If you have two school districts that really did want to consolidate and one of them has just built a beautiful new school and has lots of debt, does the -- does the other one want to take on that debt? There are some reasons that these things haven't been able to happen. The last best offer, rule on binding arbitration is a great difficulty. And town executives have been offering for a reform of that -- had been lobbying for a reform of that for a long time. So what I am really concerned about is to be able to see those things as greater obstacles than just not doing it. That I think there's a lot more sharing that already does go on, that would go on if some of those obstacles were lifted and that is something that the state, and only the state can do.

REP. ROJAS (9TH): I agree with you on that. There is a lot more that we can do. I don't know that I agree that towns would go do this on their own if simply these obstacles were removed. I think they would do some things but for the most part I think folks would maintain a status quo because that's what they're most comfortable with. But that's perhaps, you know another debate on that day.

REP. LAVIELLE (143RD): Well I agree with you but I can't speak for everybody.

REP. ROJAS (9TH): Yep, yep.

REP. LAVIELLE (143RD): And I won't try.
REP. ROJAS (9TH): Sure. Well thank you, I appreciate it.

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

SENATOR CASSANO (4TH): Representative Delnicki.

REP. DELNICKI (14TH): Thank you, Mr. Chair. And thank you, Representative for coming forward today and testifying. I do want to ask you a couple of questions pertaining to some language in the Bill and get your gut read on it. And I go to line 207 where alternate sources of revenue for municipal governments, regional councils of governments and regional education service centers as one of the keys here to what this Commission is going to look at. What do you see that leading to? Could we be looking at literally a regional sales tax or a regional property tax or even conceivably a regional income tax charge like -- well say New York City does that.

REP. LAVIELLE (143RD): Well, you could and you know the problem is that it's very hard to tell exactly how to interpret all of this language. It's still quite vague. And I can't say for sure what the legislative intent is but as you agglomerate more responsibilities and more work at the level of say a COG, I'm a little less worried about the regional education service centers than I am about the COGs because the risks could conceivably take on a little bit more work than they do without having tax authority or something like that. But at the level of the COG, you need more people. You need more resources. And that has come up quite often in discussions that we've had over the years. And I think the last thing we need is another layer of taxes. We have enough and it's -- frankly Connecticut has been competitive for a long time for metropolitan, New York metropolitan area folks who
have found the taxes in Westchester county just untenable and that's one reason they came here, another reason has been for the schools. So you know I would have to look at that very, very carefully.

REP. DELNICKI (14TH): There's a couple of other troubling, I'll use that word, pieces in here and I go to line 210 about regional revenue sharing. Any feelings on that?

REP. LAVIELLE (143RD): Would you be able to give me a little -- I'm not look at the --

REP. DELNICKI (14TH): No, that's all it says is regional revenue sharing. It says nothing more as one of the focal points of this Commission.

REP. LAVIELLE (143RD): Well if that means that the property taxes from towns come up to one central place and they're reallocated, well whose doing that allocating and on whose authority? And that would worry me a great deal. If that's what that means.

REP. DELNICKI (14TH): And you're right about how vague it is and literally it is open to any and all interpretation of that Commission when they go forward. Is that -- is that fair comment?

REP. LAVIELLE (143RD): Yeah, because it well, doesn't say it's not. Again the -- if the Commission -- in the amended language it says that the Commission would not have the -- if I -- if I remember correctly because you know, I saw it this morning when it came out. I don't have it with me so I can't refer to it. I read it. I believe that it said the Commission wouldn't actually have any power to do anything. It would simply recommend. It would collect data and recommend, which is fine. Although I'm not sure we need legislation to be able to collect that data and discuss it.
REP. DELNICKI (14TH): So do you think it has more of an implication than meets the eye?

REP. LAVIELLE (143RD): Representative, I'd love to say yes but I can't say.

REP. DELNICKI (14TH): Okay.

REP. LAVIELLE (143RD): I don't know. I -- and you know we're not that far along in the session yet but I think we have to be vigilant.

REP. DELNICKI (14TH): Well I thank you for your comments and thank you for coming forward and testifying.

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

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

SENATOR CASSANO (4TH): Representative Kokoruda.

REP. KOKORUDA (101ST): Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Representative Lavielle, it's good to see you.

REP. LAVIELLE (143RD): And you.

REP. KOKORUDA (101ST): Just briefly, I think most of us are hearing the same thing you're hearing about we don't need more taxes. But you know I also see things implied so often this year. I keep hearing about you know, if we're not forced to do it we're not going to step up and help Connecticut and I think that's just the wrong message to be giving our people when they give so much. Representative Lavielle, do you have any idea how much in state income tax the people of your town give to the State of Connecticut every year?

REP. LAVIELLE (143RD): You know I don't know what the total amount is offhand, however I can tell you that for every dollar that the people in my town send to the state, the town gets two-tenths back.
And in ECS funding the town gets, and we have something over 4,000 students and something over 18,000 people, the town gets $400,000 in ECS funding.

REP. KOKORUDA (101ST): Well thank you. Thank you very much. It puts it in perspective for sure.

SENATOR CASSANO (4TH): Other comments? Just a brief comment on one of the regional aspects of this shared services. We've had before a tax proposal -- sales tax proposals for municipal sales tax of .05 cent. My town, Manchester I think was the number one benefactor from that because we generate more tax -- sales tax revenues than anyone.

REP. LAVIELLE (143RD): Really?

SENATOR CASSANO (4TH): And it would have gone to Manchester. Under this proposal, Ashford, which is in the bottom ten of the generation of tax revenues would benefit and poor towns and some of the rural towns would benefit. So I think there is some of that in that -- in that proposal but I think it's (inaudible - 04:07:15) to kind of fish things out and make us think about how we can work together and so that -- that's the way I'm looking at it so. I want to thank you for your testimony. They are voting on the toll bills. I think -- yes, my Chair is back -- Co-Chair is back. The three of us are on transportation for the tolls next door so if you see us going back and forth you know where we're going and that's what we're doing.

REP. LAVIELLE (143RD): Did I miss them?

SENATOR CASSANO (4TH): They're doing the first toll Bill right now.

REP. LAVIELLE (143RD): Oh, okay.

SENATOR CASSANO (4TH): You want to be there --
REP. LAVIELLE (143RD): I spoke on it but I have to go do the vote.

SENATOR CASSANO (4TH): I know you did. Oh, okay. All right. Thank you.

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


DONNA HAMZY CAROCCIA: Thank you, Senator Cassano, Representative McCarthy Vahey, Representative Zawistowski and Senator Champagne and other distinguished members of the Planning and Development Committee. Thank you for the opportunity to testify before you today on behalf of the Connecticut Conference of Municipalities regarding House Bill 7192, AN ACT CONCERNING MUNICIPAL AND REGIONAL OPPORTUNITIES AND EFFICIENCIES. As you all know, CCM statewide association of towns and cities but today are proud to announce that we are representing 100 percent of Connecticut’s population, so I thought I would just throw that in my testimony.

We are here just to thank the Planning and Development Committee as well as the administration for providing an opportunity to have these very robust conversations around regionalization and finding opportunities for efficiencies within local governments.

In 2017 CCM released a report called, “This Report is Different” that outlined just that really, a new path forward for towns and cities and this report was born from a partnership of both state and local partnership panel, which included 21 municipal leaders representing cities, suburban and rural communities, Republicans and Democrats. And these
recommendations would enable towns and cities to save money, increase regional collaboration and diversity -- diversify their revenue streams including the opportunity to encourage service sharing.

CCM appreciates that House Bill 7192 includes a few of our legislative program items that were born out of this report. First, creating a Regional -- creating a new Regional Performance Incentive Program (RPIP) in order to facilitate the implementation of shared services. Allowing towns and cities to override their charters to share or consolidate services. Reforms the amount of inspections fire marshals must perform to achieve compliance. The proposal also seeks to consolidate PSAPs or Public Service Answering Points. It creates the Commission on Shared School Services, restructures the Advisory Commission on Interlocal -- Intergovernmental Relations or ACIR into a more policy oriented advisory group and it proposes to consolidate tax collection and assessment services.

While CCM generally supports the majority of the proposals within the Bill, we believe that opportunities should be realized within sections 7 through -- within section 7 through 9 for the appointment of municipal officials to sit on the Commission that is created by that section. The Commission on Shared School Services under that said section.

We'd also like to call attention at this point it's the amendment or the amendment that was proposed by the administration and just give a little credit to the administration and not this -- highlighting that this conversation is really a flued one and that they are taking into consideration those comments by stakeholders throughout this process. I think it's
important to note that around conversations with regard to the creation of that Commission.

Additionally, we have concerns around sections 22 to 24 that promote the consolidation of PSAPs. While we support the idea of considering the consolidation we do believe that Senate Bill 1082, which is also before you today, provides a better road forward in that it seeks to study incentives to this regionalization and consolidation of PSAPs and it also provides an opportunity to include in that study all the new technologies that have come forward with regard to such consolidation.

I'll just stop there. If you have any other questions, I'm happy to answer them.

SENATOR CASSANO (4TH): Let me just as you one.

DONNA HAMZY CAROCCIA: Sure.

SENATOR CASSANO (4TH): The last part on the PSAPs. I know -- I know usually many times the CCM in the past has criticized us for doing too many studies and I would agree with them 100 percent, and that's one of the things we're weary of and concerned about. Do we really need to have to study PSAPs? We've seen it's been done across the country. We've seen a consolidation. We see right here still close to 100 in Connecticut. There's two in southern California. There's one in Houston and we have to have one for every city and town. We don't have to study it. We need to do something about it and we need to have to do it collectively and this is -- this is one of the good things and the bad things, the kinds of things we have in government and that we have within some of our towns. Three or four fire departments. Each has their own computer system and so on. We had that in Manchester as well, the fire dispatch and a police dispatch and
independent fire department dispatch and the town dispatch. They're all in one place now. And you know what, it's worked out well. And it's a lot cheaper and it's a lot more effective. Oh, and I forgot the ambulance company. They were too -- in that too. They had their own dispatch. You know, so there's -- there's known success in the consolation of these types of services that we don't have to study, we have to do it. And I would hope that you guys would be a driver behind us doing that on a cooperative basis where it's done at the initiative of local officials and not someone else. I was listening to your testimony thinking of something earlier. It's interesting when we look at CCM in the role that elected officials play, because they are the Board. And yet in the biggest part of our budget, the education we don't have a seat. But it's the biggest portion of our budget and sometimes almost two-thirds of the budget is kind of an interesting contrast, and say what could it do. Thank you, Donna, I appreciate your testimony.

DONNA HAMZY CAROCCIA: Thank you, Senator. Can I -- can I just make a comment on your comments --

SENATOR CASSANO (4TH): Sure, sure.

DONNA HAMZY CAROCCIA: Regarding the PSAPs? So just to be clear CCM is supportive of conversations around the consolidation of PSAPs and I believe we have been for some time now and the conversation has been had for some time. I did prepare briefly for the question you actually asked and was told that the Kimble Report, which is the report that was done on this particular issue, really focused only on call volume as that -- as it related to the PSAP consolidation. And to Representative Rojas' point earlier, there were maybe one call coming in to one PSAP today which is inefficient and so we understand
that. I think where we -- where we believe that a study is important in this case is that because that study didn't include any other impediments that might be -- or hinder the opportunities for consolidation this report could look at all of those -- those impediments including you know, who will control? Where will it be controlled? And I know in our testimony on 1082 we did site that the health districts consolidation was actually a great example of where that consolidation works so there is some attention called to the go
erness of that consolidation.

SENATOR CASSANO (4TH): All right, thank you. Representative Delnicki.

REP. DELNICKI (14TH): Yeah, thank you Mr. Chair. I think I do have one question for you. Should -- in the case of PSAPs, and we know there's frequency issues there, there's interoperability on the reporting systems there and bargaining unit contracts there. Should bargaining unit contracts be protected in any fashion so as the employees don't get harmed?

DONNA HAMZY CAROCCIA: That's a good question. I think that that -- the reason why we support a study is because those conversations and considerations should be had around that being one of the -- of the pieces that should be studied, whether or not to your point, they should be considered.

REP. DELNICKI (14TH): And secondly, should communities, cities and towns, if they don't do something be penalized?

DONNA HAMZY CAROCCIA: Thanks for that question. We don't ever believe that towns and cities should be penalized because they're acting within the framework of their roles and responsibilities and
are doing the best that they can with the resources that they have.

REP. DELNICKI (14TH): Thank you for your testimony and your answers here.

DONNA HAMZY CAROCCIA: Thank you. Thank you. I just want to mention for the record, it's been a pleasure testifying before you all this year because I think this is the last time I will testify this year, so thank you.

SENATOR CASSANO (4TH): We'll miss you. (Laughing) Thank you, Donna. Representative Winkler, then Brian Anderson, Representative Leslee Hill. Welcome.

REP. WINKLER (56TH): Good afternoon Chairperson Senator Cassano, Chairperson Representative McCarthy-Vahey, ranking members Representative Zawistowski and other distinguished members of the Planning and Development Committee. I'm Representative Mike Winkler, representing the 56th district, (inaudible - 04:17:26) and Vernon. After I signed up to speak, The Connecticut Conference of Municipalities submitted one page of electronic testimony on Raised Bill No. 7370, which was concise, comprehensive and with which I am in complete agreement. So please consider my testimony a very brief addition to Connecticut Conference of Municipalities testimony.

Yes, the fiber optic loops towns have installed on power poles can be linked town-to-town under existing law. HB 7370 is unnecessary. There is a Bill HB 846, which would clarify for the Public Utilities Regulatory Authority that in 2013 when the legislature said that municipalities could use the municipal gain, that is their spot on the power poles for any purpose, we meant any purpose.
At best, HB 7370 is unnecessary. At worst, it muddies the waters and could possibly be used as an exhibit to undermine current attempts in court to enforce the legislature's original intent. My preference is that HB 7370 not be sent to the floor of the House by this Committee. I and the Connecticut Conference of Municipalities believe this issue is already better covered through the joint favorable substitute language passed yesterday by the Energy and Technology Committees. I'd be glad to answer any questions.

SENATOR CASSANO (4TH): Any questions? No? Representative, thank you for your testimony and we'll be looking for that Bill as well. Brian? And then again Representative Leslee Hill and then John Chaponis.

BRIAN ANDERSON: Good afternoon Chairman Cassano, Chairman McCarthy Vahey and Members of the Planning and Development Committee. I'm Brian Anderson. I am a legislative coordinator for FSCME Council 4, a union of 30,000 members, about half of whom are municipal workers. Regarding Senate Bill 882 we urge you to reject the steep increase in municipal employee payments into the MERS pension fund. It is so steep as to constitute a severe wage cut to these employees.

While we acknowledge the difficulty that our municipal employers face, there seems to be a lack of acknowledgement of the difficulties that municipal employee families face. There's the myth of the overpaid public employee. I think this gets perpetuated by groups like the Yankee Institute, and editorials like Chris Powell who seems to re-write the same column twice a week for the last 20 years blaming all economic wars on public employees.
Our union represents thousands of school paraprofessionals who make so little that many of them regularly qualify for food stamps. The bulk of them receive $16,000-$19,000 per year in pay.

Our Hartford blue collar local has received 10 zero percent wage increases over the course of 24 years. Given the rate of inflation in this period, that constitutes a major wage cut. Our members have often been arbitrated into high cost health savings account, which they can't afford. At the same time they are involved in paying part of the premiums cost share. A pattern can be set by higher wage workers who can bear a higher burden receiving an HAS. That slows down and thrusts lower wage workers in an HSA that they can't access. This particularly adds the cafeteria workers, clericals, janitors and paras.

Accordingly we ask you to reject a MERS increase and we ask you to reject MERS tiering. Tiering simply means cutting the pension of the newer person. Again we face a bigger problem in this country with the diminishing middle class. We have had the best consumption-based economy in the world but the consumers are dying off. Eventually that's going to hit everybody in this economy and be a major detriment. There are a lot of myths about binding arbitration. The last good study was in 2006 that showed that municipal unions lose 60 percent of the arbitration decisions yet always we hearing binding arb is some giveaway to municipal employees.

We urge you to reject random selection of neutrals. Eliminating management and labor arbitrators will increase disputes. Random selection of the neutrals is going to erode trust in the system. When you have labor and management arbitrators and talking to both sides, they tend to push votes in the direction
of settlement. That makes arbitration shorter. It makes people come to agreement faster.

Regarding selection of neutrals. When both sides have to sit down, management and labor 'cause they are not agreeing, you force them to have to pick a neutral. This is a process that creates the most center -- the center of neutrals, exactly what you're looking for in a neutral. I don't think there's a good reason to change it. I think you will get far results if you do change it.

We would also like to remind you that municipal binding arbitration has been reformed four times since it started in the 1970s. Every single one of those reforms has been favor of management and against labor. You get to a point where it becomes ineffective and then we lose labor peace. I'll summarize.

I just point out to you the recent strikes of teachers in West Virginia, Oklahoma, Los Angeles, Kentucky, we're losing labor peace in this country. That's not good for anybody.

We don’t need more unpredictability in the arbitration process. We need to stop scapegoating working people and start fixing the root causes of our problems, including an over-reliance on the property tax system as a prime source of revenue. Connecticut’s inequitable and unbalanced system of taxation is a problem -- is the problem, not the sanitation worker, not the police officer, not the paraprofessional. I'd be happy to answer any questions.

SENATOR CASSANO (4TH): Are there any questions? Representative Arnone.

REP. ARNONE (58TH): On the pensions first. So on a municipal level, these pensions -- at least the
municipal governments have thought that they were very stable. They have paid into it. You know, the municipal employees have paid into it and the government has paid in all these years, unlike some pensions that we see on a state level. So now the big jump all of the sudden. Can you -- can you talk a little bit about how well the pension is funded and why you think that this all the sudden big punch to the municipal level on the municipal pension program that was well funded by both sides?

BRIAN ANDERSON: Yeah, thank you Representative. I'd love to address that. The MERS pension as opposed to the state employee or teacher pension has been well funded. It has been fully funded for most of its history. It was regularly at 81 percent, anything over 80 percent is considered fully funded. With recent changes in GASB, the federal system for accounting for pensions and because there has been a lower rate of return assumption, it looks like it's going to go below 80 percent. So I think that is -- caused some of the reaction. It's still a very stable pension and in very good shape.

REP. ARNONE (58TH): So you think there's a little wiggle room here in -- in increasing something -- you know increasing the fees somewhat, but maybe not as much as they are today?

BRIAN ANDERSON: As I described the plight of our lower wage workers we're against increasing yet we -- we can read tea leaves and we try to pay very close attention to what's going on in this building and what the Governor's folks are thinking. There have -- there are ongoing discussions about MERS and the future of MERS.

REP. ARNONE (58TH): Thank you. One last question now on the arbitrators. So you said you have two arbitrators, one for each side. Right now they can
actually like a jurist, they can negotiate who they want. So what happens if you pick the straw and neither one of the two arbitrators get along with the one you pick randomly? That's going to delay and really hold the process hostage.

BRIAN ANDERSON: Yeah. I think the problem is that this Bill 882 would get rid of the management arbitrator, get rid of the labor arbitrator, so you're getting rid of the person who, and I've seen this in my case. I know you find it hard to believe but sometimes we have locals who might push a little further than we advise them. You have an arbitrator whose in the room, a labor arbitrator saying, you guys come on. Like maybe you want to rethink this. Maybe you want to take a step back. This law would take that person out of the room. I assume the same thing might be happening sometimes and behind closed doors in the management room. I think the process for the neutral arbitrator -- rather the labor arbitrator and the management arbitrator for both sides to be neutral is a process designed to hone down to what you're looking for. The most middle of the road person possible. The most neutral of the neutrals and I don't think you get that through random selection. I think you get a wild card.

REP. ARNONE (58TH): Thank you very much.

SENATOR CASSANO (4TH): Representative Zawistowski.

REP. ZAWISTOWSKI (61ST): Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Thank you for coming in. Before you mentioned that increases in pension contributions were a wage cut?

BRIAN ANDERSON: Yes.

REP. ZAWISTOWSKI (61ST): How do you -- can you explain that?
BRIAN ANDERSON: Oh, if you have to take say what this Bill does, four years and 2 percent increases then 8 percent of your pay that wasn't going into your pension, 8 percent of your pay that you can use to pay your mortgage with, to pay your kids' college bill with, will not be available to you. It will be going to your pension that you're already receiving.

REP. ZAWISTOWSKI (61ST): Then how does that work with the payroll tax that the unions support for the Family Medical Leave? Isn't that also under the same definition of wage cut?

BRIAN ANDERSON: I'm not following. What tax is this?

REP. ZAWISTOWSKI (61ST): Under the Paid Family Medical Leave --

BRIAN ANDERSON: Yes.

REP. ZAWISTOWSKI (61ST): With a payroll tax of 0.5 percent, is that also a wage cut under your definition?

BRIAN ANDERSON: The versions I've seen of it exempt public employees so it doesn't affect the people I represent.

REP. ZAWISTOWSKI (61ST): Okay. But it would be a wage cut for anybody else that's not public employees, right?

BRIAN ANDERSON: I think any time that you could say that percentage of someone's wage is coming out for another issue, you could say that. But I also think it's balanced out by, are you receiving a new benefit as in paid FMLA or are you exist -- are you receiving what you existing or supposed to receive like this? Where you're not getting an additional benefit, but you are losing pay.
REP. ZAWISTOWSKI (61ST): And I do understand that Paid Family Leave is also a possible negotiated benefit. So if you -- if it is collectively bargained to participate in Paid Family Leave they are actually paying that amount in; is that correct or am I wrong on that?

BRIAN ANDERSON: I believe so but the Bill's not before us so I guess we'll have to see the language.

REP. ZAWISTOWSKI (61ST): Okay, thank you very much.

BRIAN ANDERSON: You're welcome.

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

SENATOR CASSANO (4TH): Anyone else? Sorry, Madam Chair.

REP. MCCARTHY VAHEY (133RD): Thank you, Mr. Chair and Mr. Anderson, thank you for being here with us. I think you mentioned that over the course of time there have been, maybe since the 70s, four different modifications or changes to collective bargaining. Can you just give a brief outline of what those have been?

BRIAN ANDERSON: I cannot remember all of them.

REP. MCCARTHY VAHEY (133RD): It's not a quiz.

BRIAN ANDERSON: I was not here, but --

REP. MCCARTHY VAHEY (133RD): A general sense even.

BRIAN ANDERSON: Yes. By -- one that sticks in my mind the most and I think is the hardest for laborers to follow is binding arbitration is not binding. That was one of the reforms. Binding arbitration used to be that the arbitrator made the decision and it was binding on both sides. The law was changed so that the municipalities could reject the award. Labor is not allowed to reject the
award. That was a gigantic and I think destructive change.

REP. MCCARTHY VAHEY (133RD): Thank you for that. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

SENATOR CASSANO (4TH): Representative Delnicki.

REP. DELNICKI (14TH): Thank you, Mr. Chair. Thank you for coming forward, Brian. I -- are you willing -- 'cause we have got a number of Bills that are before us today and if you don't want to answer or make a comment on this one, I can understand that because I'm catching you kind of off guard here. 7192 where they're looking at a number of issues in there and when Jonathan Harris was before us I asked him this question and conceivably it could be part of it. Reduction of long-term liabilities of municipalities and I mentioned pensions and I mentioned bonding. Do you have any feeling on that one way or the other?

BRIAN ANDERSON: I -- we have some concerns because there's been such an emphasis on trying to cut pensions, on trying to cut what workers currently have. We see pensions as a sacred pact. People have been told if you work and you put into your pension and you pay with your labor for your pension, at the end of your career you're going to get a pension so to have a body recommend changes to that pension I have great concern about. I don't think it's fair to tell people after they've been told their whole working life that if you put your sweat equity in, you get this at the end, to say somewhere in the middle or God-forbid the end, that no, we're recommending something else. US levs pretty much back that up. We do worry with the Supreme Court which has made some real, I would say radical decisions that we are worried about this sort of thing.
REP. DELNICKI (14TH): All right. I thank you for your candid answer and I appreciate your coming forward today.

SENATOR CASSANO (4TH): Representative Kokoruda.

REP. KOKORUDA (101ST): Thank you Madam, thank you Mr. Chairman. Just briefly when Jonathan Harris was here today he testified that the 2 percent for the next three years that's being talked about in this Bill for the Municipal Employees Retirement System is below the national average of employee contributions. What is the national average?

BRIAN ANDERSON: Of employee contributions? I -- I'm not certain.

REP. KOKORUDA (101ST): So you're against raising but you don't know what the national average is?

BRIAN ANDERSON: I believe -- it depends on who does the average. I believe (inaudible - 04:34:10) says 7 percent but I'm not sure if that's (inaudible - 04:34:12) with the Labor Source and frankly I would prefer to check that with the Labor Source.

REP. KOKORUDA (101ST): So but he did testify that presently with what these employees are paying is below the national average and would you have any idea on nationally where they stand with pensions, with the amount of the pension where it stands nationally? Do we have average pensions, high pensions, do you have any information on that?

BRIAN ANDERSON: I can tell you what I think. I think that we bargain on pension and healthcare working conditions. So we can have is a situation where workers forgo a wage increase for a better deal on their pensions. Or workers agree to pay a lot more on their healthcare in order that their pension payment is lower, or visa versa. So I think
you have to look at the whole bowl of wax. Putting it in isolation I don't think really gives you a good picture.

REP. KOKORUDA (101ST): I totally agree with you and -- but I think too that at every state, every town can negotiate that in their negotiations as far as better working conditions. But I was just curious because when we talked about our teachers they were willing to give us their national average of pensions and national average of contributions so it would be great to have that information.

BRIAN ANDERSON: Be happy to get it to you.

REP. KOKORUDA (101ST): Thank you, thank you.

SENATOR CASSANO (4TH): One last question. You mentioned 0 percent increases. I don't see anybody that's getting 0 percent increases with a 2 percent increase here, is take a 2 percent pay cut. Who are those getting the 0s?

BRIAN ANDERSON: A lot of blue collar municipal workers. And I think upper level municipal workers also. We all know the strain our towns have been under. If -- we have an over reliance for a property tax system. We have neighbors in New London, in Hartford where the billable areas are 100 percent used up. There is no ability to expand the property tax base. These areas also have to absorb a lot of nonprofit facilities that pay no tax and it just seems completely unfair that these towns are under such great pressure, and when they are, our people receive 0s.

SENATOR CASSANO (4TH): And that's the increase. Pay increases because the decrease of 0, so. Thank you very much. Appreciate your testimony.

BRIAN ANDERSON: Thank you.
SENATOR CASSANO (4TH): John Chaponis, John Filchak and Peter Juszczynski.

JOHN CHAPONIS: Good afternoon members of Planning and Development. My name is John Chaponis. I'm from the town of Colchester and I'm here to talk about House Bill 7192 and some of the pros and cons regarding appointed versus elected in regards to the tax collection position.

For starters, I do not believe that the Tax Collector is not a politician. They do not sit on a board, they do not vote on issues, they do not set policy, and they do not represent a constituency. A Tax Collector is a municipal employee who must perform a job function that is expressly governed by state statute.

In fact, being an elected Collector can sometimes be more difficult to perform the job. Some Tax Collectors did not -- in the past in my town, some Tax Collectors did not want to mail out delinquent notices or demands or foreclose on a property because they feared it hurt their chances for reelection. Rather than work in the office, I saw some Collectors go door to door working on their election campaign while being paid with public funds.

Senator Cassano mentioned some of the problems that have happened in the past and I'd like to share a few of ours.

Our town saw one Tax Collector resign after the town caught wind that she intentionally waived interest and taxes to the tune of more than $200,000. We had to incur additional expenses to perform an audit to go back and bill for those.
Another of our Tax Collectors only showed up for work half the time the office was open, refused to attend department head meetings, refused any direction from town leaders, and received full pay for less than full performance. The town tried everything to compel the employee to improve but the standard line was, I’m an elected official. We roughed that out for six years and at re-election their own party ousted them and didn't put them back on the ticket.

Our next Tax Collector was being paid $60,000 per year plus a $25,000 benefit package and rarely showed up for work. I am talking a few hours per week, not per day. They closed their office when all of town hall was open when people came in with cash in hand to pay their bills. This employee took the entire delinquent tax list and sent it to a company in Rhode Island, a collection agency who charges an additional 15 percent interest. People in our town were paying 33 percent interest in delinquent bills.

Not wanting to live out another eight years like that, the town took an aggressive position and came up with a separation agreement. We paid the employee $30,000 in a lump sum to exit. As a taxpayer in this town, I find this appalling.

When you appoint, you choose employees best suited for the position based on training, history, knowledge, State Certification, and experience from an unlimited pool of applicants. When you elect, the person need not be certified or ever worked a day in their life. The pool of applicants is small, less qualified and the only requirement is that they be a town resident. Having -- there have been times when we needed a Tax Collector and were given a week or two notice and we literally were all in the
office calling up people we knew who lived in town, people we knew who didn’t have a job and would be available and were asking them to take this position.

When you hire employees, employees must report to the Board of Selectman, they adhere to the rules, work a full week, submit a timecard, and be accountable. When you elect, you create town employees with no supervisor who can refuse to attend department head meetings, refuse to fill out time cards, come and go as they please, all while being paid in full with public funds.

These problems are not isolated to our town and what would be the odds of one town having three Collectors who abused this position? I don’t know if you want me to cut here. I heard the bell.

I admit that there are some great elected Tax Collectors out there to whom I mean no disrespect. I believe they are great because they are good people with a strong work ethic. I also believe they'd be the great -- the same good person with the same strong work ethic had they are appointed.

I'll end there. If you have any questions, I'd be happy to answer them.

SENATOR CASSANO (4TH): I think the first half of your testimony was testimony enough to tell us the situation that we talked about earlier today. That there is a difference between somebody that's qualified and appointed and somebody that again, all they have to do is sign up for the ballot. Appreciate it John. Any questions at all? I think you hit right off.

REP. MCCARTHY VAHEY (133RD): Thank you, Mr. Chair. And thank you, Mr. Chaponis for being here with us today as we -- I believe you were in the room
earlier when we heard from one of our elected officials, and it is really interesting again in this Committee how different our communities are around the state and some of the different impacts. So I just wanted to thank you for being here and offering that broad perspective and it's been great to hear both sides of this conversation.

JOHN CHAPONIS: Thank you.

SENATOR CASSANO (4TH): Thank you, John. John Filchak and Lyle Wray, then Peter Juszczynski and J. Stacy Yabrough.

JOHN FILCHAK: All right.

SENATOR CASSANO (4TH): Gentleman, welcome.

JOHN FILCHAK: Thank you and good afternoon. My name is John Filchak and I'm the Executive Director of the Northeastern Connecticut Council of Governments. I'm joined by -- with Dr. Lyle Wray from the Capital Regional Council Governments. We're also, oh, and I'm going to add to that. We both are members of the MORE Commission of its duration. We're both members of ACIR and we were both members of Governor Lamont's Transition Team on Shared Services that -- which one of the key recommendations was to invigorate the ACIR as a focal point for the discussion of regionalism and intergovernmental relations, etc., kind of taking it on a different path. That's really been the missing element in this state. We downsized to nine COGs but we really didn't have a home base in state government and we've had ACIR there for a long time but it's not been funded or had the breath of direction to assist us in the way that it should.

I did submit some legislation -- or some suggested amendments that I want to go to in a minute but I want to let Lyle talk here.
LYLE WRAY: Mr. Chair and Members of the Committee, thank you. Very briefly, two points.

In terms of 7192 we'd like to ask for consideration of full funding of the COGs at the last years level rather than half. So that's important for us to continue. We have been on a rollercoaster. As been mentioned I think CROG has gone from $17,000 to $800,000 in funding and up and down, so it's been difficult to do a stable funding element.

The second part, and I think this is very important. In terms of our support for ACIR, this is not a laundry list of mandates. This is a strengthened venue to consider in depth issues so that we don't have to throw spaghetti up against the wall and see what drips down but actually spend time sinking our teeth into how things work for large towns, small towns, for various regions around the state. Whether it's dispatch or many other functions, there's a lot of peculiarities and particularities that we need to consider. A re-booted ACIR we believe would strongly provide a venue for working with policy centers, with all the different towns and stakeholders so that we have a more fully formed set of proposals going forward and a work plan to achieve it. And I think that's an example. And I'll give you one very specific example.

If you want to help us to accelerate the consolidation of town and school back offices, everybody's got their own finance department, everyone has got their own HR department. Having the ACIR consider how we might move forward on that is an example of something we can consider. All the different kinds of towns and school arrangements and have an in-depth, a deep dive sort of speak into an issue, come up with idea that makes a lot of sense for many of our towns. So just one example.
JOHN FILCHAK: And I submitted this electronically but some language changes that we would like to suggest is, it's an Advisory Commission on Intergovernmental Relations. Right now it does not have any federal representation so we're suggesting to Representative from our congressional delegation. Secretary Harris mentioned earlier that I was going to mention a -- or suggest a broadening of the municipal members 'cause there's no true small towns on the ACIR. The largest town I have is 17,000 people so it drops down to 20,000 right now but that could mean that there could be no members from my region. So you'll see in the language there it adds a fourth category.

We'd like to add two more local education officials. A person from the Regional Education Service Centers, a person from the Commission on Women and Children and Seniors and a member from the Commission on Equity and Opportunity and a person from the Yukon Public Policy Center to offset that to take the five at large people off and since cost and CCM have the appointed -- appointment -- appointment of eight officials, to remove those two, so that would keep the total membership at 23.

In terms of a couple of other things I'm just going to suggest that right now it was talked about earlier that we do compile at ACIR a list of mandates which is a long list and some people read it, some people don't. I think it all goes to each of you and it's probably filed away. The state of Ohio has a neat thing that they do in that they look at Bills that were passed and see what is the actual fiscal impact on towns? Both on the general government and the education side. You get fiscal notes but they're done in a real rush. But after the Bill has been passed and it's operational, what
is it actually doing to our towns and cities? So I think that would be a task that they could take on.

And then probably most importantly is right now, ACIR at OPM is not funded or staffed properly and I'm going to suggest that up to $2 million in the RPIP monies stay at OPM so that they can be properly staffed so we can have a robust group there that can support the kind of research and other activities that we need to realize the opportunities that presents itself.

LYLE WRAY: We're over time, Mr. Chair and members of the Committee, but one thing I would say is shared services improvements and regional improvements are long haul fixes. I live in West Hartford as does Undersecretary Harris. It took 15 years for West Hartford to combine town and school services fully. So I think this is a long haul pull. We can't do everything in one session. We need to come back. And ACIR would be a venue for looking at those longer haul efforts on shared services. 911, many other kind of consolidations are going to be a long haul and we think that kind of venue is really important, needs to be strengthened and be there for the long-term. So thank you very much for the opportunity to speak today.

SENATOR CASSANO (4TH): And I do have a couple of questions, maybe comments as well and response to Mr. Filchak. I think two things to start with. I saw it two years ago on our agenda, a proposal to eliminate ASIR and I think that probably stimulated more action to make it work and clearly I sit in this seat on ACIR, representing PND so I've seen the growth and interest and so on and that's a good thing to see. So what you're talking about can happen because we've seen it's not -- just
membership participating has increased. Unfortunately there are some issues, funding issues. The staff person for ACIR is the one staff person for all committees in OPM. It is impossible to do the job the way it needs to be done and if we're serious about this -- on the one hand we're talking about moving forward and saving money but cutting the money for the COGs in half and cutting the money for the staffing in case and so -- and you can't have both. There's no way we can meet some of the - - the goals, lofty goals that I think the Governor has in his budget for us to do things on a regional cost basis and not have the funds to do it. Typically in the regions that would be probably the least bringing that about so that makes a big difference.

You talked about, John the federal -- you're talking about representatives from the like -- either one of the Senate offices in that region probably because they meet here a little more often so that staff person, not the rep, because I don't want a no-show. And they can't -- they're going to be in Washington, so.

JOHN FILCHAK: I guess the initial thought was to create the seats there for the -- for a federal connection. Give those to the five Congressional House seats and the two Senators and let them choose that so we can -- hopefully get somebody there but have that connection. We don't have that to talk about grants or programs. I think whether it's HUD programs or EPA, etc., it would be really beneficial to have them at the table.

SENATOR CASSANO (4TH): So we could create this sort but it would be the Federal House and the Federal Senate and any of their staff persons, whether it's one or five represents the position.
JOHN FILCHAK: Correct.

SENATOR CASSANO (4TH): 'Cause I think that's what with Workforce Development Board, they're very helpful, both House and Senate.

JOHN FILCHAK: Yeah.

SENATOR CASSANO (4TH): In getting information, in getting some labor Bill passed or part of a labor Bill, some of the issues that we had. So I think it's a great idea. You kicked off in my mind the role they had with Workforce and so I think that's a great suggestion.

LYLE WRAY: Mr. Chair, can I just mention, I think in the recent Crumbling Foundations Bill that just came out they're dealing in block grants, so that was a state you know, federal and regional and local effort and I think that would be helpful to have them at the table.

SENATOR CASSANO (4TH): And I think we do have a -- we put in an amendment for appointed by cost to be assured that a small town is appointed, which would forbid definition the idea of the Yukon, particularly with the downtown Hartford presents I think great suggestions. I'm concerned that we're going to need an auditorium to meet. How big would we get? And you some posed some reductions so maybe that will balance it out.

JOH FILCHAK: Well with what I suggested a little bit ago, it would be the same number of people that currently serve.

SENATOR CASSANO (4TH): All right. We'll work on that and see if we can make that work. Other questions? Representative Arnone.

REP. ARNONE (58TH): So you did talk a little bit -- we haven't talked enough on I think too is just the
combined services too between inside municipalities. I said the -- between the government side and the school side. So our district in Enfield, we've done IT we've combined. We've combined building and grounds and we're working on presently, Social Services. So it works and it works with the -- we worked with the unions on this. Every one of the steps worked smoothly, saved us a lot of money, a lot of duplication and a -- and that's a good point I think, people have to see small baby steps even within the municipalities is a -- is a you know, good first move.

JOHN FILCHAK: Yeah, and there's a tremendous amount of examples of -- within a town and both our regions have multiple programs. And I think it's important to note that all the programs we have -- we do property reevaluation regionally. We do animal control regionally. Paramedic intercept regionally. They're all voluntary. If you want to participate, you participate. If you don't want to, don't do it. It's your choice.

REP. ARNONE (58TH): I think that's important, the choice part of it too, so.

LYLE WRAY: And again, Enfield is one of our partners on a variety events but you know, on-line building permitting for example, 47 towns are in there. It becomes very efficient but 5 out of our 38 towns have fully integrated back office between school and town. So we've got 33 to go. So Enfield is sort of close, but Plainville, West Hartford, Mansfield, the others have fully integrated back office but you're making a lot of progress. So yes, things are happening and I think that's important. But the benefit of a regional service like on-line building permitting as you've got a state-of-art on-line building permitting system as a turn key and
you're ready to go and it makes it a lot easier for your town to participate.

REP. ARNONE (58TH): That's another great point. The people don't know that that just in -- so software can be you know, a part of regionalization and that was software I know our planning department loves it. Now a contractor, he doesn't even have to come into the office. He just does it from his smart phone. It's phenomenal. People love it. Everyone that walks in now says that is what government should be doing.

JOHN FILCHAK: And what makes it even more important now with embracing the IT is more and more of my towns especially are open fewer hours. Most of them are not open on Fridays. Some are only open one day a week. People still need access and we have the ability to create really the 24/7 town hall. We haven't fully done that yet or -- we're on our way but all that we have been talking about today with the information technology, we can get there but it's moving so fast and you know, we bring up the 911 centers, the PSAPs. That's been talked about for at least a dozen years. The Federal Reserve Bank did an extensive study on that and health districts, combined it's about $110 million savings a year, taking at least one scenario of consolidation. So that's part of what we see ACIR facilitating is that kind of research so you guys can take action and hopefully we can get better.

REP. ARNONE (58TH): Thank you. And we're ready for the PSAPs too so come on down and help us.

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

REP. KOKORUDA (101ST): Thank you for being here. Lyle, I've always said that you have the best voice
in this building. (Laughing) I could listen to you --

LYLE WRAY: Someone said I had a great face for radio, so I will leave that be. (Laughing)

REP. KOKORUDA (101ST): Well I didn't say that. I just -- my town -- one of my towns really took a step back 15 years ago, just what you're saying, and we shared a Finance Director. It was -- it was hard but boy, it made both the education side and the town side work better together to trust each other. It's been wonderful. The key to that has been though, who the person is that you pick. Unfortunately that can -- we've also joined with facilities now that have split again, I'd like to see that back again, IT and HR is something that we really keep pushing. But with some many new things for the Board of Ed side with HR, it's -- I don't know if one person could do as much. But, we also tried to share a building inspector with another town and -- years ago. And to tell you the truth, the building inspectors pushed back on us. They were not happy with that so I think as more and more towns -- we've been trying to get another town (inaudible - 04:57:14). We've also been, especially with this voice. We've also been working on looking at the health districts. And when we looked at it, 'cause some of these things sound so right to do. But when we looked at it, it was so costly for our town, we really looked very hard at it. It was something my town residents wanted to address and the more we looked into it we realized we couldn't afford it. So I think your point of taking baby steps is so right. There's so much that makes sense but we've got to get it right with the right people. And even with this building inspector thing I talk about, I just think we needed to work harder with them because for a small town to have a full-time
building inspector makes no sense unless you have very active development going on, which I don't think most towns do. So, I agree with what you said. I think we all know there's a benefit to regionalization. I think lots is being done, but I'm happy to see the state sort of get out of the way and allow it, but then again not penalize if we don't do it fast enough so, whichever just want to respond on that?

JOHN FILCHAK: Well I think it's, you know one of -- one of the reasons we switched to COGs as opposed to the three setups we had before with non-elected officials is our respective boards are the Chief Elected Officials, they're the most accountable people locally. So if they decide to do a cooperative purchasing program like Lyle's got or shared inspections that you're suggesting or any of the other programs, that's the right way to go. It's a deliberate body that can -- that can put that together. By having ACIR on it that we can go to and get researched hours from and pilot money from to try some of these things, to show that they will work. For example in a couple days I'm going to be presenting a proposal to do HR regionally because I have small towns and they don't have HR departments or its somebody's 14th job and they do get in trouble on occasion. So there's way we can help and it does -- it's not a one size fits all so what works in my region, really rural region may not work in the CROG region or in the southwest. So we have to be flexible too even though we're a small -- small state.

LYE WRAY: Can I just add one thing? I think even a CROG with 38 cities and towns, one size doesn't fit all. We go from very small to large and I think that's a very important thing to be very attuned of
and we try very hard to make sure that we provide services that are interesting to all levels of town.

The other thing I think is interesting here is and we look at very small towns, and that's one of the groups I've very concerned about. If we're using Quick Books for our finance system, we're looking for trouble. I mean it just -- I'm mentioning them by name and no lawyers from Quick Books please don't accost me, but if you're using small accounting systems, we need to move up on that. One example that John is more familiar with now than I am and that's our neighboring, what it is 50 miles away maybe, Franklin County? 50 miles up 91 has a program where they have finance particularly as a collection of small towns. So it's not one or two towns, it's like six or how many? 14 towns. But then you have really good software, really good finance and I think you have to show the benefits to people because that's -- that's where we're headed and for national software, when you get to that scale it's much, much better. It gives you much more control.

Again, when I was in the Midwest as a County Manager you really -- you really have to be pretty clever to steal money. To spend a dollar you have to have a budget line item, a control number, your pin number, your supervisor's pin number. Nothing moves until there's a very tight financial control. That's just not true if you have a very small system. It's just more open to abuse; not that people would do it but you don't want the temptation there. But I think we have to be adaptive to size of towns. It takes time, just as you were saying in Enfield, of moving toward back office consolidation on towns and schools. And again, you have to sort of take your time to get that right. And one of the key aspects when we talk about this, United Kingdom studied
shared services and they said the number one issue was -- number two -- two issues were communication and trust in building regional services. In otherward you have to have a lot of communication and you have to build a trust and those are critical elements that sometimes take time that we just simply have to put in.

REP. KOKORUDA (101ST): I would just add with that trust budgets get passed. Once we saw that happen, it was amazing year after year where we used some of our -- you have two budgets votes. Budgets would be voted on, they weren't. That trust is so important, but -- thank you for all your input. There's so much more we could be doing but you're exactly right. Even -- I think the one size fits all mentality is people who have not been involved in town governments, small town government. Thank you.

LYLE WRAY: Thank you.

JOHN FILCHAK: Right. Thank you.


REP. MCCARTHY VAHEY (133RD): Thank you, Mr. Chair and thank you gentleman for being here today and I appreciate especially that last comment, the communication and trust, which certainly do take time and those are things that are hopefully built on a foundation and built upon over time. But speaking of time, I wanted to go back to what you said about West Hartford, not meaning to pick on West Hartford so, my fellow reps out there. But it took 15 years to get to a point where they were able to combine within the town and I also want to thank Representative Arnone for pointing that out. You're suggesting that we do we need to take time and I
agree with you completely. We need to be thoughtful about what we're doing and why we're doing it. Do you think that that's a reasonable timeframe? I'm guessing you don't. And if not, what kind of timeframe do you think is a reasonable timeframe?

LYLE WRAY: Thank you, Madam Chair and Mr. Chair. I think it depends on the task. And I would think that the back office consolidation of towns and schools could move more quickly now given that there's a level of trust and people have seen it working before. The second thing I think that accelerates things right now is the availability of better software and IT. It's just easier to do things. The on-line building permitting we talked about couldn't exist without really good software. We have two vendors, which is important to have two choices. And we can set that up in a month in your town and go from paperclips and pens to being able to check on line about where your permit so I think IT is the second aspect that speeds it up. But the third thing, and many people ask the question, so if shared services are such a great idea why don't they just spontaneously combust in towns? Well it's a huge amount of work. When we did our 47 on on-line building permitting you know that's been a five-year process and a heck of a lot of work just with one function. So I think that element of properly funding COGs to be that supportive element can speed things up. But I think it's going to be related to the tasks. Some things -- I think PSAPs are probably a five or ten or fifteen year total process, which isn't necessarily bad because of turnover and people, collective bargaining agreements, just a whole lot of different moving parts. But something like IT service sharing between schools and towns, I think that's a couple of years in terms of helping them to get it done.
So I think that technical assistance capacity both at the COG level and IC -- ACIR thinking it through, I think we can do things faster, would be my answer.

JOHN FILCHAK: And I'll just -- you know, I would agree. And it depends on the -- it does depend on the service. We started in 2004 a -- a brief -- what we called Regional Animal Control, three towns. Today it has 19 towns. You have to kind of say, okay it works. And someone says, oh okay. And now we stretch all the way to Colchester, which is in a different region so same thing with our -- our property reval program, we're in another region. Multiple programs that CROG has are in up to what, 100 and some odd --

LYLE WRAY: 110 towns.

JOHN FILCHAK: So it's sort of like show me if it works. So you have to demo these things. So that's where -- I get concerned when they say, well we'll fund you but it has to be fully regionalized, it has to be 100 percent of your towns. That's really not practical. You're not going to get 100 percent of your towns on almost any program. Some just won't do it. But that doesn't mean it's not something we should pursue and do for our communities. So it does -- I mean right now as an offshoot of our paramedic program we're studying -- we're having a harder and harder time as they are -- as people are across the state, getting volunteers. What's the best way to deliver pre-hospital emergency care? How to respond. So we're about -- we're just finishing up a study on that which may involve, as one of the options, the consolidation of ambulance companies and some of the responses that we do now because it's harder and harder to put together teams and we're going more and more to paid systems. So again, it's not that it's going to work everywhere
but we have to try these things out and experiment a bit.

LYLE WRAY: Can I add one thing I forgot? We had a -- as Chairman Cassano mentioned, Yukon downtown has been a great asset. We had a conference a week ago Thursday on the Silver Tsunami of Retirements in the state. About a quarter of the public service can retire within five years with no replacements in sight, and I think we're going to have to get a lot -- back to the point of your pacing. The innovation is going to have to happen. I don't know about other members here but we put request for applications out for positions and we get like crickets. It's a very tough thing. So I think part of this is going to speed up when there's a lot of vacancies. So if you only have one IT director and you're sitting there and you don't have one on the town side, I think is what happened with Hartford, they said well, how about if you did two for a little more money? And that's what happens. But I think this -- if you have a quarter of the workforce retiring within five years and in some cases they have pension benefits who will start deteriorating if they don't retire, we're going to have to get a lot more creative and I think that's going to be sort of a fire end or a feat to sort of pick up the pace on some of these aspects.

REP. MCCARTHY VAHEY (133RD): I appreciate that and I appreciate you naming the cycle of innovation because certainly we often don't keep pace in this building with that at all, so -- and government is designed to be deliberative, which I appreciate and respect but this is an area you're right, we're going to have to be able to respond. I have -- I have another question for you.
LYLE WRAY: Sure. Can I -- Can I just one thing? I heard a great line when I was in Washington D.C. recently. They said, in the private sector we celebrate innovation and in the public sector we investigate it. (Laughing)

REP. MCCARTHY VAHEY (133RD): So my question was with respect to the number of communities you have who have already consolidated within communities, you said there are 33 -- 5 who have done it and 33 remaining. And Representative Arnone is an example of one community that is moving in that direction. Of those 33, how many do you see moving in that direction within their communities right now?

LYLE WRAY: I'd say about a third are like Enfield that have done some of the consolidations. I think our big challenge are the very small communities because they're -- they're really stressed to have one of each and I think that's going to be a bigger challenge so helping them to plan is the thing we hope to do. But I would say about a third of our towns are going there. And again, it's incremental. You know, sometimes you have a vacancy in a critical position you say hey, how about doing both? Sometimes there's a conversation about linking the two. Sometimes, and I don't think I'm telling tales out of school, it relates to the relationship between the Board of Ed and the town council so there's a lot of factors. But I think about a third if I had to put a number out there, are sort of you know, coming along where Enfield is or you're further along, but a number of them are sort of in that process.

JOHN FILCHAK: And we have several that are also going that path and to add to that we have three towns that are -- they've kind of on and off but discussions have actually consolidating the three
towns into one town. They're small, quite small by most standards but their ability with the realities from funding from the state and the property taxes are they just can't keep up. So even combined they would be under 6,000 people. So that -- they are -- there's a lot of discussions out there as to what are the options? What's the best way to go? No one wants to lose their identify but there are realities.

REP. MCCARTHY VAHEY (133RD): Thank you. The two of you represent two of the nine COGs in the community so do you have any sense of what is happening with the other COGs in terms of the same thing where towns and Boards of Eds are working together?

JOHN FILCHAK: I think you've got examples of towns and Boards of Ed working together across the state. Some pretty -- you've got some that have been doing it for a very long time and very successfully. Well one of your towns, Mansfield is probably the longest standing one of probably 30 years. I believe Madison is another good example of that. So there's some -- there's some good examples of them out there. It should work and there's no real reason for a very small town with a very limited town hall staff to be doing their own payroll and all those other things. They should be partnering up and that and IT, etc., we're doubling up all too often.

REP. MCCARTHY VAHEY (133RD): But as far you know there isn't data that necessarily exists in terms of what is happening out there now.

LYLE WRAY: No, I'm not aware of it.

REP. MCCARTHY VAHEY (133RD): You have anecdotal information, you have data on your particular COGs but there's not necessarily one place where all that exists.
LYLE WRAY: Not aware. We -- we -- back to the MORE Commission we encouraged a study of back office shared services between town and schools as a priority and we continue that. Was that part of the shared services?

JOHN FILHAK: Yes.

LYLE WRAY: So we're encouraging that but again, I don't know the data specifically because I think it's partial in the sense that sometimes might share functions but if you said everything, you know IT, HR, property assets, property management, you know four or five functions I really -- I don't know of any data like that that exists statewide.

JOHN FILCHAK: There was some of the hope when the network was being rolled out and the towns were all being connected and so forth that there would be a lot of this local kind of activity if you will, in sharing, etc., but I'm not -- you know I don't think there is an inventory of who did what. And unfortunately a lot with the network the cost, especially for the smaller towns in my area was just prohibitive for them to hook into. So it -- it sits in a corner on a box and they're on a broadband.

LYLE WRAY: Could I just state one thing more? I think -- if I had a magic wand I think that would be one of the front burner topics for ACIR to consider, which is you know, status of AC -- status of I -- of consolidation between towns and schools and then looking for a plan region by region to come up with a way of accelerating that with -- with again voluntary participation but I think it's again one of those -- part of the issue here is that this is not spontaneous combustion in a sense, this is a lot of work. I mean this takes a lot of work to coordinate software and employ HR functions and is a
lot of work. And again, trying to be helpful maybe the regions can help step on the gas.

REP. MCCARTHY VAHEY (133RD): And I appreciate that. I think that as I view myself here as a member of this Committee our job is to help support the work of our towns and communities and do the best we can to partner and that's why I'm interested certainly in that conversation around ACIR and the COGs as well, but you both have been very informative as always and I thank you for your time here today.

LYLE WRAY: You're welcome, thank you.

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

SENATOR CASSANO (4TH): Thank you, Madam. A couple of quick questions or comments. I'm thinking four years ago this conversation wouldn't have taken place. Two years ago I think we probably got into that point. Now I think it's becoming a part of our regional culture in this area which is good to see. One of the things that I found sitting as a Mayor and since then, I think one of the difficulties we have in our communities is the change over every election. If I recall the last two, three local elections we saw change over nearly 50 percent. CROG at that time had 29 towns and up to 38 towns and still literally half of the Mayors or First Selectman weren't back the next two years. Many retired, got voted out, a whole variety of reasons but the fact is, change over. And if I were a newly elected town official the last thing I'm going to think about is going to CROG. I've got to find out what it means to be the Mayor or the First Selectman or whatever that position is. And so they spend a tremendous amount of time not being a part of the region because they're elected by the community to do a job. That in itself is good, but it's also
detriment because they lose their resources of the region and rarely do we see first-hand officials unless in many cases there's a -- the town manager is involved as the town manager in that town they might make a difference but in the smaller towns you don't see that participation. That is something that we have to -- we have to do -- some way to reach out to newly-elected officials.

LYLE WRAY: If I can make one comment on that?

SENATOR CASSANO (4TH): Sure.

JOHN FILCHAK: It's not aging me too much but in my career I've now served 79 different CEOs. That's a lot. You know, trying to develop programs and get continuity is difficult. I have some envy of Massachusetts in that I believe all 350 whatever towns they have, have either a town administrator or town manager. So you do have the continuity of administration and management that you can work with. You know, so it is difficult at times. You're all geared up. I had one year when I had -- back when I had 11 towns where 9 of my CEOs either lost or didn't run. I had the added thing where no one could sign a check (laughing), but it's a -- it does push it back a bit.

SENATOR CASSANO (4TH): It's an issue.

LYLE WRAY: Mr. Chairman, I think the -- you make a very good point about connecting with elected officials and turnover and the body of council and governments is a challenge. But I can mention a secret and that is the -- the staff level working groups. Public safety, transportation and others are long-standing groups as you well know thrive under your leadership not to flatter you too much, started doing you know Regional Homeland Security efforts before the state. And so that group has
been going on since you know, you know for a number of -- 16, 17 years. So -- but those kind of continuities at the staff working level, you know regional dive teams, regional bomb squads, regional swat teams, regional emergency management, regional transportation planning and funding. So that's what keeps the continuity going in larger COGs but that's not a substitute for what you're saying, as getting the Chief Elected Officials involved and I agree with your comment. At least we have the continuity of that -- at some of the staff working group levels.

SENATOR CASSANO (4TH): And I saved the $64,000 question for last. Why is that we can work easier with the next town than we can work with our own Boards of Ed? (Laughing) And that's what we see. We see a lot of consolidation of services with this town, that town and so on, but down the street in the school where the School Board meets, it doesn't work. It's a mess you could say somehow.

LYLE WRAY: I think that's a rhetorical question Mr. Chairman. (Laughing)

SENATOR CASSANO (4TH): I will leave it at that, gentleman. Thank you very much.

LYLE WRAY: Thank you very much for the opportunity.

SENATOR CASSANO (4TH): Okay, Peter. There are -- one, two, three, four, five, six people still from CM -- CCMC. Are they all here? Do any of you want to come up together or? We have Peter, we have J. Stacy Yabrough, Patricia Maisio, Cassie Gorman, Darlene Tynan and I guess that's five. We'll even give you extra time. (Laughing) Thank you very much. Welcome.

PETER JUSZCZYSKSI: Thank you, Mr. Chairman for letting us speak today. One of the things we talk
about -- I submitted written testimony already. Oh excuse me, my name is Peter Juszczynski. I am the elected Tax Collector for the Town of Windsor Locks. We're here to talk about HB 7 -- 7192, specifically Section 17 which would sunset the elected Tax Collector.

A lot of this has already been covered but I wanted to touch on a couple of points which were, you know we're a home rule state and because of that you know, I think the home rule started because the state government realized they can't run the day-to-day activities of towns and municipalities so because of that it gives us the ability to -- to create our governing backwinds are Charters and -- so those are the things that we go with. We are -- our day-to-day activities is through our Charter. And obviously over time, things change. Sometimes -- and towns do change their Charter but there is a mechanism to change that Charter, which is the Charter Revision Commission. They're done infrequently for a reason. It's a slow process. It's designed that way. It's designed because it -- you don't want constant changing every couple of years to a new form of government back and forth. So I think that's important to recognize. It's designed to have resident input, which I think is missing here. I mean the municipalities themselves need to be able to sort of speak in terms of how they want their government to be run. I think it just eliminates the choice for the residents of town.

I also think that the Bill potentially could create a worse situation in a sense that it addresses nothing in here other than it eliminates as we've talked about before, 70 certified collectors when their term expires and then it's up to the municipality to not only pick the next collector,
but the next -- to select their criteria. So the criteria wouldn't even have to be someone that is certified. It could simply a political appointment, which is, excuse me, which I think is sort of going way from what we were initially talking about. I think the intent of that is to make it less political and gives the potential of being even more political. So with that I will go over to Pat.

PATRICIA MAISIO: Thank you. Mr. Chairman, esteemed members of the Commission, I'm here also in opposition to 7192 to eliminate elected Tax Collectors. Thank you for taking so much time today to listen to us.

SENATOR CASSANO (4TH): Your name too, please?

PATRICIA MAISIO: I'm sorry?

SENATOR CASSANO (4TH): Your name.

PATRICIA MAISIO: Oh, I have that on my sheet, okay. I have so many other things.

SENATOR CASSANO (4TH): We're fine, we're not going to bite. You relax.

PATRICIA MAISIO: Okay. Thank you. (Laughing) My name is Patricia Maisio. I'm the Tax Collector for the town of Redding which is a population of approximately 9,400 people. I've been the Tax Collector, elected Tax Collector since November of 1979, 40 years. Maybe longer than some people in this room are old. I'm getting old. I take great -- first I also want to say please don't judge elected Tax Collectors by Colchester. That is a situation all by itself. There's good and bad in every profession. There are many more that we could talk about that are not elected if you wanted to get into that conversation. I take great pride in serving Redding. I have a passion and deep
commitment to public service. I've served as President of both the Connecticut Tax Collector's Association and the Northeast Regional Tax Collector's and Treasurer's Association and I'm currently the President of the Fairfield County Association. I'm a member of OPM Certification Committee and for many years was an instructor for three of the four courses required to become a Certified Tax Collector. I'm motivated by learning, sharing skills and promoting professionalism. Being elected allows me to balance my personal life and my professional life. Maybe you're able to enjoy that same privilege as elected officials yourselves. I certainly hope so.

Being elected allows all of us to create department policy and change -- and challenges us to find innovative solutions to not only department issues but for our taxpayers as well. By taking elected status away, you minimize our leadership roles. Think for a second about some of your friends or relatives at home and their attitude toward their employment. Do they have the grit and determination that you have as an elected official? Do they have that fire to do more for others and know they made a difference in as many lives as you do as an elected official? If you're honest, you know that they don't. Being elected is a calling. You have it or you don't. It allows taxpayers to look at how you live your life. Are you the person they want to fight or work to have fighting for them or working for them? We as the -- as Tax Collectors feel the same way. We want to make a difference for our municipality. Allow us to continue to do that. By implementing the Bill of removing elected Collectors you tell residents, taxpayers and voters of Connecticut that their voice does not matter. I'm concerned about the big picture here. You want to
remove elected Tax Collectors. Why? Does it save the state money? Does it make people want to move to Connecticut? What purpose does it serve? The answer is none. Unless of course, it's the beginning of removing positions that are in your way.

I've heard -- I heard from an elected official friend in New Hampshire who went through something very similar. He said, the first year one elected position was removed. The next year fourteen elected positions were removed. Where are we going with this? Part of the language of your Bill is that we as elected are not professionals. You are all elected. Are you professionals? Of course you are. Were you professional legislatures before you were elected? Did you have specific qualifications or training or legislature school to attend? No, but you like us want to do a professional public service job. We like you, do our jobs with great pride and integrity. Fix something in Connecticut that is broken. It definitely is not the Tax -- elected Tax Collector profession. Vote no for taking the voice away from the people. Allow home rule to do its job. Allow municipalities their own form of government and operate as their Charter directs. Vote against this Bill to remove elected Tax Collectors. You really want to do something beneficial? Give the Tax Collectors more work. Give us motor vehicle registrations to do. Elected Collectors are eager to help solve Connecticut problems. We want to work with you. Please don't vote against us. Elected professionals keep electing -- keep elected professionals elected. Thank you for your time.
DARLENE TYNAN: Good afternoon. My name is Darlene Tynan and I am the elected Tax Collector for the Town of Wolcott. I did submit testimony already opposing this and asking for you guys not to consider it, but I just want to give you the case scenario. In my town of Wolcott of less 17,000 I was the Municipal Agent for seven years and our Tax Collector who was in office, elected for over 30 years won her bid and then decided to retire so that -- a political party put in her replacement. So within two years we had half the town coming up into the office complaining about every little thing that -- I mean it was just -- it was a horror story, which is the only reason I put in my name. I mean you are correct when you say, anyone an put their name in and run but you also have to -- my background was in banking but I still had no intention of becoming a Tax Collector, but when I saw that our town was in trouble, I ran and I mean thank God I won because now our office is in -- back and running great. I do believe in our Charter. We've had it since 1964. It's been revised ten times, and if there's an issue in town people aren't shy anymore. They are coming up and holding us accountable for anything. So with that said, I don't want to re -- I did submit this. I'm not going to read it because you just heard from two people here and it's been a long day, so if you have any questions?

SENATOR CASSANO (4TH): Yes, let me respond to that. Sometimes people wonder you know why do I go up and testify. I sit here and I wait for hours and so on. I think the three of you testifying for me has made a substantial difference. I'm basing some of my thought on stories I've heard and I hadn't even heard about Colchester, but I -- a small town in my district that I knew about that had a real situation
and so when you have that experience here, you get somewhat negative about it and I think you helped me go back to remembering that we are a bit of home rule and that this is a -- this is a right at ballot to be able to choose if you want -- if the town chooses to do so. Maybe in as we tend to fill that ballot with two people from two political parties, and I think those political parties ought to be responsible for making sure that the candidate that runs, if they're going to run from a party might be able to at least add or subtract or be able to do the job quite honestly. Sometimes we -- we nominate a name as opposed to a capable person because they can get elected. That's part of the process. So if you wonder why you came up here, I think you had a very powerful testimony here today that reminds us of home rule and you know, who are we to judge how you should pick your taxpayer and your town in a state that has traditionally always allowed that to be done locally, so thank you for coming up here.

Questions? Representative Delnicki.

REP. DELNICKI (14TH): Yeah, thank you Mr. Chair and thank you for coming forward. Real simple question and I think I already know what the answer is. If you're in a local store in the community and one of your constituents walks up to you at 6:00-7:00 at night say at the local stop and shop. Would you go ahead and answer a question for them?

DARLENE TYNAN: I'll do one better. Now that we have access to release people on weekends, they go by vehicles and if they're held up I will go to work and I will release them if their taxes are paid in full, 'cause sometimes it takes some time. Absolutely I would do that. I will listen them, yeah. It's 24/7. It's not like we punch in and punch out. It's 24/7 for us. That's how I feel and I'm sure I can speak for these guys too.
PATRICIA MAISIO: I feel exactly the same way. Whenever I'm shopping, someone comes up to me and says, oh Pat, I owe you motor vehicle tax, can you tell me how much it is? And I'm thinking to myself, I don't even know your name let alone how much you owe me in tax, but I'll be happy to look it up for you. So sometimes on my phone I'll log into the system and find out what their bill is and let them know. I've gone to the town hall on weekends for people who have questions or their working on something. I've gone so far as to put my cell phone number on my delinquent bills so that people were able to get me when I was going to be away or something.

REP. DELNICKI (14TH): You know I dare say that -- and I'm not taking anything away from professional paid hired staff 'cause they're paid, they're hired to have office hours and do what they do, and I know each and every one of us sitting up here if we're at a stop and shop or at Home Depot, we're at Lowe's -- I mean literally I went into Lowe's one day and I had a three-hour town hall. (Laughing) And by -- I get asked when I get home, where were you? And I said, oh I was at Lowe's. For three hours? I said, yep, for three hours.


REP. DELNICKI (14TH): How'd you know? (Laughing) The Manchester side, I was hoping you'd be there on the Manchester side so I could point them over to the Manchester side. But the point being, that's the kind of service that you get with somebody who desires the position, runs for the position and gets elected to the position, right?

DARLENE TYNAN: Yes, it is.
PATRICIA MAISIO: I agree.

REP. DELNICKI (14TH): Thank you, Mr. Chair and thank you for coming forward to testify.

DARLENE TYNAN: Thank you all very much.

SENATOR CASSANO (4TH): Representative Arnone.

REP. ARNONE (58TH): Thank you, Mr. Chair. Thank you Peter for coming today, everybody sitting here almost seven hours and from my adopted home of Windsor Locks, I appreciate the -- taking the time. You've heard me all day how I feel about this so I won't take any longer. But with Charters, so do you know either -- any of you have ever had an attempt to change in your knowledge, your Charter and what the outcome was?

PATRICIA MAISIO: Can I answer.

DARLENE TYNAN: Absolutely.

PATRICIA MAISIO: Redding does not have a Charter. We operate by ordinance and state statute. But having been an instructor for the courses I do know that once a Charter is opened, everything in the Charter becomes open. You can't go into a Charter just to change one little thing that you want changed. Now the whole Charter, your whole town Charter is open to scrutiny.

DARLENE TYNAN: The town of Wolcott has never opened it for this -- for this reason.

PETER JUSZCYNSKI: So about four years ago we had a Charter Revision Commission and it was brought up but it was -- it was rejected. I mean it wasn't -- didn't even make it to the ballot to be -- or make it to the referendum or anything. It was just -- nobody was interested in changing it. I think they liked the accountability of having an elected
Collector. I mean we have an elected Clerk, First Selectman. I mean I think the arguments that are made could be made for all three positions. So I don't -- I guess I don't understand necessarily the attraction of the Collector because call of us are really considered professionals, you know. Town Clerk, First Selectman, so. But no, to answer your question, no. And I think one prior time it was voted down so Winsor Locks seems to want to keep it as an elected position, so.

REP. ARNONE (58TH): Curiously now after you're elected, you are an employee are you not?

PETER JUSZCYNISKI: Yes.

REP. ARNONE (58TH): Saying, all around. Thank you very much and again, thank you for waiting around today.

SENATOR CASSANO (4TH): Okay. Thank you very much. Oh, one more question I'm sorry.

REP. MCCARTHY VAHEY (133RD): It's more of a comment I will admit, thank you Mr. Chair. And thanks to all three of you, I agree, for staying here with us and for your service to your communities. I just wanted to comment that I do think that many of us who are elected who -- what we do is a call. I also think that there are many people in my life who are paid employee professionals who view their work as call -- callings as well, and certainly put in the kind of time and care that all of us hope to and try to do too. And I appreciate just the perspective, like I said earlier, it's been interesting to hear from both sides. And this being a new issue to ponder for me, I am continuing to weigh that, but your testimony was -- was wonderful today so thank you.
PETER JUSZCZYNSKI: I'd just like to make one more comment. I think we have -- you know half of our association are appointed so we understand that there's no right answer so, you know? But it -- that's why -- you know that's why it should be left up to the municipalities to decide because either way they're elected or appointed, it's really I think the choice of the residents that we serve, so that's -- I just wanted to make that point, so.

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

PETER JUSZCZYNSKI: Thank you.


STEVE SALERNO: I am Stephen M. Salerno. I am the President of the Southington Police Union. I have been a police officer for 23 years and I'm here to speak about Bill 882. I'm going to be as brief as possible as I know it's been a long day, and as candid as possible.

The proposed Bill is written with the increases to the MERS pension of 6 percent over three years will, I'm going to be honest with you, will be a serious whack to our families.

We negotiated raises and increases in our insurance premiums, some other ones too, with our raises, not planning for this. A reasonable increase to our contributions we do not have a problem with. We can read the tea leaves as well and we know we have a good pension. We know it's funded fairly well but we do know that with the current climate and everything else, we should be paying a little more, but reasonably. Not 6 percent over three years,
which by year three this would be 120 percent increase into our contributions. We are the working middle class. We have families, and as police officers we plan our lives out years in advance. It's just the -- unfortunately it's the way our career is, and we bring a lot of stress home to the family. That's another part of our careers. This isn't going to help the way this Bill is written right now. We don't need this stress, we don't need the aggravation. I don't -- I was probably supposed to be in briefing two hours ago. My guys are probably still waiting to go on the road but -- we don't like coming up here and doing things like this. We really don't. We want to go to work, we want to do our job, we want to come home safe, we want to go to our families, but the way this Bill is written, when we saw this and it's causing a lot of stress at home and at work. And I will say it again, we're not opposed to a raise in our contributions, we are not. But something much more reasonable than this. Over time, over a few years, 11 percent I think that's a little high. Maybe 7.5. I know in 2015 they proposed 7 -- getting to 7.5 percent and that seems a little more reasonable. We did submit written testimony and that is in our letter. We just want to be treated fairly. We don't mind helping, but this is -- we feel is very unreasonable and we feel working together we can come up with something much better that works for everybody. Any questions?

SENATOR CASSANO (4TH): Yes, again thanks for taking the time to come up here and testify and we know how hectic it is for you guys to keep a schedule. Raised earlier, we discussed this a couple of times through this hearing and (inaudible - 05:40:09) was heavy because I don't think I've seen too many increases -- salary increases that are (inaudible -
in the last couple of years. It's been a -- it's been a flat economy and the increases haven't been there so, it is by definition a pay cut whether they look at it that way or not so I'm glad you came up to testify on it. It's important to hear from people on this. It does have an impact so thanks again. Representative Delnicki.

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

STEVE SALERNO: Thank you.

REP. DELNICKI (14TH): And testifying. You know, to me I see it more of a collective bargaining type situation that should be occurring here where both sides sit down, discuss the issue and hammer something out as opposed to basically a mandate. What's your opinion on that?

STEVE SALERNO: We would love to have a seat at the table and to work something out. I mean, the way the MERS is structured they write in what your contribution is going to be and that's what you're going to pay. I talked to our Town Manager over the summer before any of this came out and said, we would be willing to pay a little more to provide some relief to the towns. We understand. I mean these are -- this is the current climate and anyone that doesn't admit it, they're lying to you. We would love to have a seat at the table to find something more reasonable. We're willing to help, it's just getting something rammed down our throats that's going to hurt us at home and like I said, add more stress to an already stressful career in your lives, and I'm speaking on behalf of people not just police officers. There's other municipal employees in my field. We would love to have a seat at the table and help and I'm sure we could come up with
something where everyone feels like we're moving in the right direction.

REP. DELNICKI (14TH): You know what we see here today is something that happens when you don't have both sides talking, only one side talking. And I've had the honor and privilege of knowing the men and women of the South Windsor Police Department and you have a very difficult job 'cause quite frankly, 99 percent of the time people think you're wrong regardless of what you're doing, even though it's right.

STEVE SALERNO: You are right, sir.

REP. DELNICKI (14TH): And you do -- you deal with people on their worst days --

STEVE SALERNO: Every day on their worst day.

REP. DELNICKI (14TH): And that's the other catch-all for you.

STEVE SALERNO: You are right again, sir.

REP. DELNICKI (14TH): So I don't know how we go about having any kind of meaningful discussions back and forth but I think it's high time that there were some kind of methodology to have some kind of meaningful discussion back and forth because you obviously -- you've displayed a willingness to want to be part of the solution but you don't want to have the solution beat over your head either.

STEVE SALERNO: I couldn't say it better.

REP. DELNICKI (14TH): Well thank you for coming out and thank you, Mr. Chair.

SENATOR CASSANO (4TH): Thank you for coming out. Go home instead of to the group.

STEVE SALERNO: Thank you.

JACK QINGYU TANG: Okay. Distinguished Madam Chair McCarthy Vahey and Chairman Cassano, and the Honorable Members of the Planning and Development Committee, my name is Jack Qingyu Tang. I’m a private citizen, a husband, and a father from Wilton, Connecticut. Today I testify with my strongest opposition to HB7192, and all other endless variations that carry and spread the same cancer of forced regionalization, although under increasingly crafty and deceptive covers.

While the most conspicuous forms of this cancer, like the initial SB738/SB457 provoked the strongest public outcry and were defeated in the Committee, the DNA of the same cancer had morphed into Governor’s Bill SB874 Sections 1-4, and now almost cloned verbatim into this Bill HB7192 Sections 7-10. Even with some last-minute “amendment” today that removed the explicit language of redistricting, it still has not changed an iota of its overall forced-in-disguise nature towards a genuinely voluntary nature that any critical thinking people could trust and agree to.

With the creation of an unelected but powerful commission that will last 8 long stacked with about 16 appointees from the government plus a token representation from one school parent, which near-completely circumvent the checks and balances from the towns and their people, this Bill represents a disguised form of modern day tyrannical rule, which will still render the current state government fundamentally illegal and utterly immoral in the eyes of the people of Connecticut, and severely -- severely handicap any likely good the Governor has
promised or intended to do. Once enacted, such de facto forced regionalization laws or their even watered down versions would still violate the will of the so many people and irreversibly destroy people’s trust in the current state government, and unleash dangerously accelerating self-destructions in the familiar social-economic chain reaction, plummeting property values, massive exodus or extinction of current businesses, a statewide economic depression, drastic increases in unemployment/poverty/disease, free-falling educational qualities, and skyrocketing crime rates, which would lead to even more people fleeing the state; and the rapidly vanishing taxpayer base would cause even the so-called safe unionized teachers and government workers to lose their jobs or work with decimated pay or benefits. And this vicious cycle would quickly repeat until the entire state of Connecticut tailspins into a dystopia of total economic, cultural and moral desolation, where a dejectedly poor leftover population permanently struggle in anguished misery and hopelessness.

So Members of this Committee, rise up again to be the mama bear or the daddy lion, and kill this Bill. Also out of your conscience and deep love for the legally disadvantaged ordinary people and children and their future unborn children, be the unblinking eye and vigilantly watch this vicious cancer of forced regionalization and stop its spread in any forms and at any stages including via budget implementer Bills, or worst of all some strike-all amendment towards the end of this legislative session without any bipartisan discussion, Committee process, or public discourse. Finally, let us again defend liberty 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, Connecticut. Thank you.

SENATOR CASSANO (4TH): Are there questions? Great testimony, Jack. Thank you very much.

JACK QINGYU TANG: Wonder if I can ask for a few extra grace minutes?

SENATOR CASSANO (4TH): I'm sorry, we can't. We have multiple meetings going on.

JACK QINGYU TANG: To understand of why this passion for fighting for the people of small towns, because otherwise the Governor would not get --

SENATOR CASSANO (4TH): All right. We have a set of rules, Jack that you have to go by and it's five minutes and it's 5:00 and so, thank you very much for testifying. We appreciate it.

JACK QINGYU TANG: Okay. Thank you.

SENATOR CASSANO (4TH): Caroline Unger.

CAROLINE UNGER: Hello, distinguished members of the Committee, Ranking Members, Chairs, I've got that all out of order but I'm new to this. My name is Caroline Unger. I come from Wilton, Connecticut. Thank you for giving me the opportunity to be here to testify against those sections of HB 7192 that pertain to school regionalization, specifically sections 7 through 10. I've been pondering throughout the day what to do given the edits that have -- we've learned about this morning. I don't think they go far enough and so I think my perspective is still valid and I still want you to hear it, so here I am.
I'm not here as an expert on education policy or as an expert in anything fiscal. I'm here bringing the perspective of the Mom, a full-time working Mom who evaluates every decision in front of me with the lens of what's best for my children. I also bring the perspective of a person who moved to Connecticut five years ago with our number one reason being the schools and I'm a person who would consider leaving the state should our towns not be able to maintain or increase the quality of education that can be provided. So I'll tell you in no uncertain terms that what we learned over the last few months has really changed the conversation in my home.

So my husband and I previously were talking how we could more substantively contribute to our community. Now we're talking about where's the line that pushes us out of our community and makes us make the decision to leave Wilton and leave Connecticut? And what that boils down to for us is the quality of the schools.

So we've heard a lot about the Bills, we heard a lot of perspective about what they are really about, what the end game is. We've seen the modification to the language but we also have seen members of the Education Committee respond in aggressive in antagonistic manner towards members of the public that chose to testify against SB 874. We've seen some legislatures scoff at the idea that the Bills are causing distress in our communities and that Bill is a very pervasive perception that Hartford is coming after Fairfield County residents and schools and that the number one thing that has brought many families to our town is now at significant risk.

I know definitively perception matters. It impacts how people make decisions. The perception of these bills, and the specter of a year and half of
uncertainty while a commission studies and provides recommendations on regionalization and redistricting, although maybe not redistricting anymore, means that Connecticut and Fairfield County have a perception problem. The lack of clarity on the outcome of this, the lack of any mention of education quality, the fact that the commission would be made up of appointed members with only parent. All of these increase the perception of risk and the perception that the result could be highly damaging to our schools and to student outcomes. This is having an impact now and it's not a good one. Schools matter. They attract people to the state. They keep them here. They attract businesses to the state. They keep businesses here. Were you to put through, even the revised version of Section 7 through 10 of this Bill you must expect that you're playing a hand in pushing current residents and businesses out of the state and in preventing new residents and businesses from coming to the state. So as I said, I'm just a working Mom and not a financial expert but given the dire fiscal situation Connecticut is in, I'm very sure that that's not a desired outcome for this Committee. Thank you for your time.

SENATOR CASSANO (4TH): Thank you for your testimony. You said you're not an expert, you're a mom. I think the moms are the experts for the school system personally. It's -- I just saw some numbers recently. I think of all the top school systems in the State of Connecticut, all are in the Fairfield County in the top ten except for one, Glastonbury, which is in my district. And I can tell you, multiple times people told me I have moved here for the school system and when my child graduates from high school, I can't afford to live here as it is and I'm going to leave. And I think
I've heard that same thing from parents from Fairfield County. There is nothing more important than a child, than a good education and the parents will steer them in that case when they can afford to do that, and sometimes when they can't afford to do that for the sake of the child. That's why I look at the parent as the expert in that case. We have had tremendous testimony. Obviously there have been changes in the Bill and there will probably be more changes in the Bill. Sometimes we get Bills that are introduced in this building that are introduced to provoke conversation. Well they sure provoke conversation and made our job a lot more difficult quite honestly (laughing) but sometimes that's nature of the beast and it makes you think. So I appreciate you coming up to testify. I know where you're coming from, and thank you.

CAROLINE UNGER: Thank you.

SENATOR CASSANO (4TH): Questions or comments? Representative Kokoruda.

REP. KOKORUDA (101ST): Well I just want to agree with Senator Cassano. You become an expert when you become a mom when it comes to education. I just wanted to tell you this morning first thing I got was a text from a young mother from New Canaan and she's also a realtor. And I written something yesterday and she was responding to it and she said, you cannot believe what's happened in our town. She said the real estate is in such flux right now with these comments, and you're exactly right, with this task force. What we do up here matters and when we scare people, it matters. And she told me that she has lost -- right now she has four real estate deals that have been pulled back on this one issue. So I know it's throughout the state. I will tell you, there are a lot of great school systems in
Connecticut. I take great pride in having one in Madison. I know West Hartford has incredible high schools, throughout the Lyme area. But I think we've heard it the most when Fairfield, because it was Senator Duff's Bill, I think there was a real concern. But I totally hear you. You know, when I mention that we're impacting the economy, we are.

CAROLINE UNGER: Yes.

REP. KOKORUDA (101ST): And I saw it this morning and I told her I said, you know I think people are starting to listen but I worry because it seems to me everything up here, every time an idea comes and we don't act on it, it comes back in three or four years. This budget that was put out, there were so many ideas that we have discussed here, negotiated and decided not to do and now we find it in a budget in a year that we're in crisis. So I totally agree with you. I thank you for coming up. I get it. It's pretty scary and I think it's extremely scary for Fairfield County but it is for our real estate. Thank you.


JILL LAGATTUTA: Madam Chair, Mr. Chairman, and members of the Committee, I'm Jill LaGattuta from New Canaan. I have three kids in two public schools and I'm here to oppose HB 7192 sections 7-10, which pertain to the School Commission tasked "with developing a plan for the redistricting or consolidation of school districts. That's line 446. I think services is thrown in there somewhere, but I don't think this benefits the state, except maybe monetarily, and giving the state a mandate to reorganize schools at all levels has the potential to harm schools, people and towns, and be -- and be
to the detriment of what is now a top selling point for our state, Connecticut's top ranking educationally.

This commission of appointees will review the fine details of each school including school building size and capacity, school transportation, athletic schedules, and make -- this is a quote, make "recommendations regarding school building usage within and among school districts" and the use of "tax changes." Does this mean setting up Boards of Ed as separate taxing authorities as we sign HB 7319? And then deliver all this to the Governor and The Education Committee as well as others. So then what? Legislators legislate, that's what they do and we thank you for it, sometimes.

As others have testified, the prospect of the state reaching deep into the organization of each school and rearranging school districts has united people across party lines and eroded people's trust in government. I haven't read Mr. Harris' amendments -- amendment but my concern, and what I think many people are concerned about, is that removing the words redistricting and regionalization may not remove the intent of the Bill, and I don't actually believe it does as much as the concerning wording remains from what I've seen. With redistricting removed, I wonder what else we can't discern in the words "consolidation" and "efficiency," and what a supermajority will pass when the recommendations are put before them.

I also think you can't take these five -- that you can't take this Bill in isolation from the four others that we've seen, as school regionalization was a priority for the Governor right out of the gate with ideas like separating Boards of Ed from
their towns coming out of the Governor’s transition Committee, which I testified against on Friday.

As Gail Lavielle said, districts are already regionalizing of their own volition, and the legislature does have a role to play in incentivizing voluntary regionalization and shared services. Certainly some of these things could make sense and find widespread support, so I could imagine some iteration of this getting support. However even without the words redistricting and regionalization, I am very much opposed to HB 7912. Thank you for your consideration.

SENATOR CASSANO (4TH): Just one question from me. Are you opposed to the Board of Education and the town side and combining some of those services within the boundaries of the town that you live in?

JILL LAGATTUTA: I have to say that I personally support there. There are things that the Board of Ed and the town definitely could share and I heard about that on the town side and I don't know about the Board of Ed side. But I think actually that could be a good idea, yeah.

SENATOR CASSANO (4TH): And that would be -- it's not -- the word regionalization is the hallow word in this building quite honestly but it is a shared services Bill and I think we would all like to see one our towns only have two finance directors, one from each side, two of this, two of that and there's a lot of that thing that can be done in-house and towns are doing that and I think I know a lot of the towns in Fairfield County are doing that. They take -- they're taking leadership positions and doing that. But you're not opposed to that? It's just -- it's beyond the boundaries.
JILL LAGATTUTA: No, I think that's one of the benefits.

SENATOR CASSANO (4TH): Okay.

JILL LAGATTUTA: The potential benefits of towns and Boards of Education remaining a unit and communities making decisions together as a community about their priorities.

SENATOR CASSANO (4TH): Right, okay. Thank you. Other questions? Seeing none, thank you very much. Appreciate it.

JILL LAGATTUTA: Okay. Thank you, Committee.

SENATOR CASSANO (4TH): Save the best for last? How are you?

BETSY GARA: Wait until you see what I have to say.

SENATOR CASSANO (4TH): So how much time do you spend a year sitting in these chairs waiting? (Laughing)

BETSY GARA: Well I appreciate the time that you all take and listening to the testimony. It's certainly a difficult job and it is much appreciated. Thank you. Betsy Gara. I'm the Executive Director Connecticut Council of Small Towns and we have submitted testimony on a number of Bills. I just wanted to touch briefly on Senate Bill 1082, AN ACT CONCERNING THE CONSOLIDATION OF PUBLIC SAFETY ANSWERING POINTS, and I appreciate that you raised this Bill. We did request that it be raised by this Committee. I know municipalities are often criticized, particularly small towns because they -- people feel that they don't want to share services, they don't want to consolidate functions and it really isn't -- is not true. As you heard from the Councils of Government that testified earlier, there is a lot of shared services occurring, a lot of
regional approaches and it is necessary. Town budgets are strained. They're looking for ways to save money and this is the reason that we support this Bill. We do feel that consolidating PSAPs is incredible opportunity to reduce costs and enhance the delivery of services. We've looked at this issue very carefully over the last few years. We've actually shifted our position. Initially we had concerns about this but now we do think that it is very important that we facilitate the opportunities for towns to consolidate this function. It's improved quality of service in towns that have done it, increased coordination of emergency service and there's certain — certainly long-term savings. So towns right now are going to have to, and they've begun doing this, have to upgrade their technology in the call centers and this is very expensive. And so part of this is — the reason that we're supporting this is to help towns avoid those additional costs.

There are issues that need to be addressed. Any time you try to consolidate functions you're going to run up into barriers such as issues of personnel, labor, software compatibility, liability, lack of initial start-up funding and lack of community support. But these are all surmountable barriers and we do think that this Bill will help us address them and help position us to ensure that we can move forward with consolidation with this function to save money. So thank you for raising the Bill.

SENATOR CASSANO (4TH): Questions? Betsy, thank you very much.

BETSY GARA: Thank you.

SENATOR CASSANO (4TH): And we do have three additions to the agenda. Steve Hudspeth from

STEVE HUDSPETH:  Thank you very much.

SENATOR CASSANO (4TH):  Thought we forgot you, huh?  
(Laughing)

STEVE HUDSPETH:  I knew you wouldn't forget me.  You always know it's the end of the hearing when I'm on, right?  Steve Hudspeth from Wilton.  Madam Chair, Mr. Chair and all Committee members.  I rise here to speak on 7192, partially in opposition.  First of all let me say I'm delighted to hear what the Governor has done already.  I think it's a very positive step forward.  As you've heard from other speakers, there remain fears associated with what's going on here.

Let me say first of all that as you know I've said when I've been here before the objective is do no harm.  I'm not going to repeat that now.  What I am going to say is that when I say things that shouldn't be done, I also feel I need to offer things that should be done.  And so I offered a plan that I laid out in my testimony.  It has six elements to it and if you go into my testimony and look at the bottom of the first page over to the second page you will see what those three elements are -- those six elements are.  They start with three that are focused on what I think needs to be addressed right now.

And those three are, for small districts that take large amounts of state money, something has to be done.  I make a proposal to that end.  For larger districts that are way over the suggested maximum optimal size of 2,900 students breaking them into smaller units to me makes a lot of sense.  Making
the existing statute 10-158(a) that I've spoken to before more user friendly is very important, and as I read this statute 71 -- or proposed legislation 7192 in lines 1115 to 1121 there is something that seems to contemplate the ability to act jointly in a constructive way, not withstanding other statutes that might impede that possibility. Now having read this statute knowing how much is -- is in it, it's very hard for me to tell exactly how that's supposed to work but if it is aimed at helping 10-158(a) be more effective, we've talked about it in the context of SPED, joint town activities to that end. There are lots of things that could be done that could really work well jointly among towns acting voluntarily. Not mandated but acting voluntarily, and that's what I hope we'll so. So that was item three.

The last three are things that I think the state does extremely well right now and that we ought to build on. One is our tech schools are tremendous resources but they have long waiting lists. We ought to expand those schools. We ought to open up new ones. I make a suggestion for adding two new ones and I think it would be the most productive ROI we could possibly do in this state. And they have college tracks as well professional trade tracks that really give students a wonderful opportunity. That's number one.

Number two, the open choice program. This seems to be working very, very effectively in the Hartford area with something like 2,300 students going to something like 26 different towns in a busing arrangement outside of Hartford. That's very, very constructive. I'd love to see that expanded and I'd love to see town like mine, Wilton, contributing to that process in ways that I outline and what I put in this testimony. I think we need constructive
solutions here. I need -- think we need to understand that racial equality has to be at the heart of what we're doing. Let's put aside all the other stuff about mandatory consolidation, about forcing town separations and municipal government. Let's stop that and let's get to the heart of the issue. How do we deal with equality in education? That's a fundamental duty of all of us, both as a state and as individual citizens. Now is the time to come to address it. I don't suggest my six recommendations are necessarily the way you would all choose to go or the right way to go. But I do think they start a framework for honest discussion about what is really at the heart of what is before us here. And that's what I would strongly urge you to make a priority for yourselves. And I know for many of you, it is a priority right now, which is wonderful.

I've spoken long enough. I thank you for your patience. It is always a pleasure to be here. From these hearings I always learn a huge amount of new things and I've got to tell you, that Southington Sergeant is one impressive presenter. Very, very moved by what he had to say. Our people are concerned about what the 911 does. They're already talking in town like we've got to stop rebuilding our police department building that's terribly over crowded because they don't know what the 911 part of 719 -- 92 means. I don't know what it means either but I sure you know this far better than I, will sort that out. I do encourage you to tell our local state leader -- local town leaders what it is the state contemplates by way of the cost to be imposed on them for this 911 plan. Because our First Selectman said as recently as last night, I don't know what this is going to cost but we've got to put everything else for our police department on hold
until we figure out what the financial impact is for us.

SENATOR CASSANO (4TH): I assume they have a telephone service?

STEVE HUDSPETH: I'm sorry?

SENATOR CASSANO (4TH): I assume they have a telephone service, right? They can probably call their Representative.

STEVE HUDSPETH: I think we use your state one, which it seems like we're trying to de-regionalize 911. I don't -- I don't understand the concept.

SENATOR CASSANO (4TH): In a way we are. We've got over PSAPs. Do we need 100 in Connecticut, in one of the smallest states geographically while Las Angeles has -- southern California has two. Houston has one. Connecticut has 100.

STEVE HUDSPETH: (Crosstalk)

SENATOR CASSANO (4TH): Your First Selectman might want to talk to the Rep or the Senator that represents Wilton and might get some feedback on that.

STEVE HUDSPETH: And that would be very good. And I do -- I would very much encourage that and I think it's -- this can be a very useful thing. I just -- people need to know exactly what's contemplated, that's my only point there.

SENATOR CASSANO (4TH): I want to thank you for pointing out the need --

STEVE HUDSPETH: Thank you very much for your patience and hearing me out.

SENATOR CASSANO (4TH): Don't leave yet, Steve. You suggested -- one of your suggestions of the three
that you went over is so important and that's the tech schools. We have between sub-base between Sikorsky and Pratt and Whitney, 35,000 new tech jobs, manufacturing jobs that are going to be sitting here over these next five years and we are not prepared for it. Our school system is not prepared for it. Our children in the school system are not prepared for it. The tech schools are not going to be able to pick up that burden even if they were expanded, and it's an issue that we need to look at far beyond the tech schools. The public schools are going to start to go back to having some of that tech knowledge in their school systems for these kids that go to school there because the future is real as far as jobs and economy. A situation that hasn't existed for a long time. Kids will stay in school instead of dropping out. There's all kinds of benefits if we start to do that. We got into a trend where everybody has to go to college. That was the philosophy of many of our Boards of Ed and we forgot these kids and so I think you're right about the tech schools and we know the need is there. The desire is there and we have three of the major manufacturers in the world sitting right here in Connecticut trying to fill positions and they can't do it so they come in by bus load from New Hampshire and Maine and so on. I worked at Pratt. I saw those buses. I parked right beside them, filled with people who took their paychecks back to Maine or New Hampshire or Vermont or whatever it might be so, good suggestion.

STEVE HUDSPETH: Well thank you and I may just speak to that for a minute. I have spoken with Senior Administrators in the Wilton Public Schools about that very subject. And they say themselves that that's something they should focus on. But I do think that what I've seen at Abbot, when I took one
person up there and found that they wanted him but they had to put him on the fourth waiting list, that's how many students they had wanting to get into Abbot, the quality of what they do there and the fact that their students -- and the Assistant Principal I spoke with told me, they've got not only these great technical jobs but also one of them admitted to MIT, he actually took a technical job, the employer said we'll pay you a huge amount of money and two years from now we'll send you to MIT on scholarship if you come back to us. And they have it under RPI and other places. These are absolutely outstanding schools with outstanding performance results and very, very much to be commended. It's a great state success story. Our state DOE should be very, very proud of its role in this.

SENATOR CASSANO (4TH): Thanks very much. Maria. Karen still here? Yeah, okay. Again, we have a vote going on right now so when my Co-Chair comes back I'm going to run out to vote on those dreaded -- those dreaded tolls.

MARIA WEINGARTEN: Honorable members of the Planning and Development Committee, thank you so much.

As a parent of public school students in New Canaan, a member of the Board of Finance and I'm a realtor in New Canaan, Connecticut so I -- I totally understand that you're saying and we had a discussion on that in our Tuesday meeting. I am testifying in opposition to HB 7192 Sections 7 to 10, establishing a commission on shared school services for the purpose of developing a plan which currently struck language on regionalization and consolidation and is now focused on collaborations, and of the school services and school districts.
The Bill was developed with original language containing regionalization and consolidation and we are thankful that the Governor listened to the concerns of the electorate, and specific language has been struck but there needs to be more clarification. Many of us feel the intent of this legislation is no different and believe it just provides for this very powerful appointed Commission. One size does not fit all in this state and there is a widespread data collection that will be done through this Bill and by this appointed Commission and it still raises a great deal of concerns about what is seen as the real end game here. A slow world towards equalization and mass consolidation.

Some other thoughts. Connecticut is ranked either number three or number five in education in the country. And that's because education is really a local affair. So our towns are very dedicated to making sure that our education is cost effective and is done as best as we can. And it has been successful and it's rated so highly because it's been managed locally. Hartford is also ranked number 49 in fiscal solvency and Connecticut has many, many problems and Hartford should focus on fixing areas that are not functioning instead of trying to implement a one size fits all policy and destroying the lifeboat of Connecticut and its local schools.

There was a Bill -- or actually there is a report by the Hartford Public Found -- Hartford Foundation for Public Giving, which basically said that there really is no savings in consolidation. And there's no meaningful improvement in outcomes either. So again, one has to question why these Bills are being put forth. So I would like to address a couple of the specific language items that are listed in the
Bill. Most concerning is that there's nowhere in this Bill where the legislature is required to vote on any and all plans that are going to be coming out of this Commission. The Commission consists of 15 of 17 members, all appointed by Democratic leaders of the legislature and the Governor, who were the ones who first -- were the ones who consider support -- submitted the consolidation Bills and there's little doubt as to what their thoughts are on this matter.

Parents and citizens alike do not have a voice in the formation of the Commission. Only one member is going to be a parent of a student enrolled at a public school. Therefore the views of the parents will not be adequately represented in the composition. The Commission will exit, Line 492 says the Commission will exist for eight years, until June of 2027. The looming protracted uncertainty is very detrimental to our local economy.

Line 597-598 the Bill does not say whether the incentives, grants or tax charges -- changes will be forced, coerced or voluntary. Line 600-603 the Bill does not say what threshold of districts will be considered. Line 605 refers to a public hearing but there's no mention of a vote in legislature. Why not? Line 613 the reports and plans develops shall be submitted to the General Assembly, but there's no vote on that. Why not? Line 633 the Bill says the shared and consolidated services includes but is not limited to administrative functions. That leaves this Committee with a great deal of latitude in its decision making on future consolidation and regionalization.

Rather than breaking what is working well and what has worked well historically, why not institute a
study of the failing schools?  Shouldn't the goal here be to improve outcomes rather than just equalization of all students?  Why do some of the companion Bills in the House and the Senate explicitly exclude the very districts, the cities of Hartford, Stanford, Bridgeport, New Haven and Waterbury that are underperforming.  These are the very schools which are represented by the -- a lot of the Democrat leaders who proposed these consolidation Bills in the first place and many of them are represented on the Education Committees and this very Committee as well.

REP. BAKER (124TH):  Can you please summarize, please?

MARIA WEINGARTEN:  Yep.  The Bills should be focused -- focused on consolidation when in fact deconsolidation may achieve a greater outcome as had been mentioned just previously.  Nearly 20 years ago, in summary, train rides were shorter, tolls and taxes were not looming over us, the pension issue though significant was not as large as it is today, businesses were moving out of New York to be in Connecticut and the schools were a big magnet for families like mine.  Well the train ride is longer, more unreliable, taxes are upgoing higher, the pensions are out of control and all those businesses have been driven out.  Many potential and current resident could overlook that if they believe they're doing right by their children, sending them to good schools.  Don't take away that last attractive attribute for families to move to Connecticut.  Direct your legislative attention instead to those districts that need improvement and we will all support that.  Thank you.

REP. BAKER (124TH):  Thank you for coming out here and spending the time as you elaborate and give the
information. Are there any members of the Committee that had any questions? Well thank you once again for coming out.

MARIA WEINGARTEN: Can I just mention one more thing as a realtor?

REP. BAKER (124TH): No, your time is up and I just thank you for coming out here and sharing the information. Representative Kokoruda.

REP. KOKORUDA (101ST): My text this morning came from a realtor in your town and she was at that Tuesday meeting. It sounds like the whole town goes to it. But she is really scared. She is really scared. She said she's got one child left in the system, one in college and she just was begging me to you know -- I want to ask you something. What are you saying? Are you saying the same thing she's saying with real estate in your town?

MARIA WEINGARTEN: Yes. We are seeing open houses where people are asking us about this legislation. We had one person tell me that they were looking at a home in Wilton versus New Canaan and they decided to go with New Canaan because their understanding was Wilton might have -- there has been talk about that merger possibly with Norwalk and you know, based on probate lines. Well the reality that's not necessarily going to be what happens but that's so far what's been out there. So there's a lot of misinformation out there as well, so it's concerning. But I think the bigger thing to really consider is, if you look -- think about the millennial buyer and this is what I was originally going to mention. The millennial buyer wants to live in a more urban environment. That's sort of the mind set so if we really can find a way to fix the education in these city schools, it would be such a win-win for our entire state. And so I think
that that's like more of a vision thing where we really have to focus on what's -- what's wrong. Let's focus on what's wrong and find ways to correct it and that would be a much better time and energy spent than trying to break down what's already working well.

REP. KOKORUDA (101ST): Can I just ask you one more question? Do you have an opinion on why this legislation was written so that the legislature would not vote on this? You brought up the fact that part of the Bill actually has the legislature not vote.

MARIA WEINGARTEN: Right.

REP. KOKORUDA (101ST): Well we're going to get the information but we're not going to vote.

MARIA WEINGARTEN: Right.

REP. KOKORUDA (101ST): Do you have an opinion on why that would be that way?

MARIA WEINGARTEN: Well my opinion would be that you don't have to be -- have to have someone who is held accountable for certain -- and you know again, I think about whose on some of these Committees and I'm like wow, that's really interesting. All the -- all the small towns aren't necessarily represented on Planning and Development or on Education and all the larger towns that might benefit from more funding going to them but not having to deal with these consolidation issues are not. And I just -- I just found that somewhat telling as well.

REP. KOKORUDA (101ST): Okay. Thank you, thank you very much.

MARIA WEINGARTEN: Thank you.
REP. BAKER (124TH): Thank you, Representative. Thank you for coming out here this evening.

MARIA WEINGARTEN: Thank you.

REP. BAKER (124TH): Next we have Karen Silver -- Silverberg?

KAREN SILVERBERG: That's correct. Can you hear me? Okay. Good evening Honorable Co-chairs who are not here, Vice-Chairs Baker and Senator Bradley, Ranking Members Senator Champagne who is not here, Representative Zawistowski who is here, and other Members of the Planning and Development Committee. My name is Karen Silverberg. I'm a 50-year resident of the State of Connecticut. I love Connecticut. I do not want to leave. All my family has left. I have four other siblings and my dad and my mother and they've already left for other pastures I'm afraid.

I am strongly opposed to wording in Sections 7-10 of HB 7192. My major objection is that it would provide a path to school redistricting and consolidation, but it that would not lead to more efficiency. I have spoken out and submitted testimony previously about wording in another Bill currently before this Committee on March 15, HRB 7319, and three before the Education Committee on 3/1/2019-SB 457, SB738 and Section 1 through 4 of Governor's Budget Bill 874. I am also vehemently against disassociating school districts from their municipalities and creating separate taxing and bonding abilities for the same.

Today I come to speak because I have multiple concerns about Section 7 through 10 of HB 7192 because of the redistricting and consolidation language and the power given to Commissions to do the same.
This new Commission on Shared School Services would be given the mandate to redistrict or consolidate school services and school districts. The wording redistricting and consolidating are repeated seven times in these sections. However, nowhere in these sections is there any mention of educational outcomes as a reason for redistricting or consolidation of schools. Consolidations of school systems have only shown to have an educational benefits when we're going from small districts to midsized districts. Midsize districts with 2000-4000 students on average are known to provide the best chance of success for children. Many of the districts that have such a structure, especially around Fairfield County and some of the suburbs and cities are thriving. Why touch something that is not broken?

Money and time would be better spent to provide the solutions to problems that have tangible solutions. The 2013 Seton Hall study entitled The Educational Case against School District Consolidation referenced the following as major predictors of poor school performance and proficiency -- poor proficiency. Poor attendance increased overall student mobility, high student to faculty ratio, increased faculty mobility, low median faculty experience, low total cost spent per student -- per student, and economic class. District structures were found to have very little to do with academic outcomes. As far as consolidation for efficiencies, Syracuse University Center for Policy and Research has shown no increase in cost effectiveness in districts larger than 1500 students. So there's no effectiveness in larger districts. It boggles my mind that we're talking about efficiency.
Okay. So what I'd like to say is large districts lead to more top-heavy administrative salaries and leveling up of all salaries. And they really lead to parent distrust and apathy. And I feel like those are some of the things that maybe could be solved in the large cities by breaking up these consolidated school districts so parents have a greater sense of their local school and maybe wouldn't -- I'm not saying all parents are apathetic, we have just as many apathetic parents in the suburbs but I'm saying we have smaller schools, so maybe not as -- as big of a problem.

I just want to say too about the Commission. The Commission is going to be all appointed by either legislatures of the Governor. I really don't think that is open Democratic government. I think that it really opens the way for Socialism and I mean Socialism with a Capital S, not a small S. When everything is top down instead of bottom, up, I just don't think that's Democratic government. I've been in Connecticut for 50 years. I remember in -- during the Bicentennial, what pride we all took in living and learning our history in Connecticut and I'd just like you to take a look at some other states that tried redistricting. Maine, Vermont, Massachusetts. Look what happened in Newark where someone came in and just spent $100 million and billions of dollars and showed very little improvement by trying to consolidate and re-work the school districts. I'd like to see more socioeconomic incentives in the cities. I think the greatest gift we can give to our children is families with -- with socioeconomic mobility, not school mobility. And it's perhaps the greatest gift we could give them as far as their health outcomes and their educational outcomes. And for these reasons I'm asking you to please reject language in
HB 7192 that includes any mention of redistricting schools or forced consolidation of districts. Thank you so much.

SENATOR CASSANO (4TH): Thank you for your testimony. Are there any questions? As you know, a lot of that is being reworked and so on and --

KAREN SILVERBERG: Right. I just came prepared for this morning when I read this, but --

SENATOR CASSANO (4TH): Okay, thank you. Paul Knag. Last one.

PAUL KNAG: I just got here on time.

SENATOR CASSANO (4TH): I noticed. You're lucky I let you in. (Laughing)

PAUL KNAG: It's the fastest I've ever had.

SENATOR CASSANO (4TH): I know, I'm wondering if that's fair to all that have been here for five hours, but you signed up so you're good.

PAUL KNAG: Thank you. I'm here to testify in opposition to the school regionalization provisions of HB 7192, section 7 to 10, including the revisions that were made or about to be made at the suggestion of the Governor. I'm -- I'm an attorney and I'm a resident of the town of Darien. Connecticut is a state with the highest or second highest taxes in the country. Its people are facing massive new taxes -- tax increases. It is 50th out of 50 states in predicted future economic opportunity according to a track that I just read. We have among the highest debt and among the highest unfounded -- unfunded liabilities. Unlike most states our population is shrinking every year and that is result in large part to the fact that companies have left or are leaving. Even Warren Buffett warns companies, don't go to places like Connecticut where
they have this high debt and overhang. And if you talk to any real estate agent you know that the property values have been in a long-term decline in most of the state.

So one has to ask, you know why would someone come to Connecticut or at least stay here despite all these problems? And I'm -- I'm lucky enough to have three children and thirteen -- fourteen grandchildren who I'm trying to get to come to Connecticut and -- come back to Connecticut. And one reason they would come is that our public education system has such an outstanding reputation. People come and live in our state, live in our towns because they want their kids to get better education than they can get if they live in Manhattan or somewhere else. So I -- so my plea here is, please do not go forward with this idea of regionalization. Please take out these provision sections 7 to 10 of HB 7192 because even as the Governor modified them they still have the intent, the same intent. We don't need a Commission made up of you know, two union officials and others who are not school parents or real stakeholders in the process and charter to make decisions for the towns when the towns have been doing such a good job overall in running good schools. We don't want people to find ways to change local control into district control. With a long list of reports to be done, without any definition of reports as to which towns, at least you would think that the Bill should be limited to some small subset of towns like towns under 1,000 students where it's perceived that there could be real savings, but it's not limited in that way. And -- or the towns where they're getting undue amounts of state funding because of -- undue amounts of state fundings because of inefficiency. And even before this Bill is passed it's having a terrible
impact on us here in Connecticut. The people, the real estate agents have -- tell me that people -- everyone who comes to talk to them, their first question or one of their first questions is, what's happening to the schools here? What are they going to do to us? What are they going to do to us? So that's you. So those of us who are here and our children and grandchildren, we'll have to decide what to do if things are allowed to spiral downhill and we don't want to have to move away because we like this state. So I ask you for the sake of our state, for the sake of my children and my grandchildren, our children and our grandchildren, leave these schools that are so outstanding alone and allow them to continue to be a shining light, bringing people into our state and keeping people here in our state.

SENATOR CASSANO (4TH): Thank you, Paul. And changes have already been taking place and this is a long process, believe me. Once a Bill gets to the floor rarely does the Bill ever go through the process without changes and this is one that will see dramatic change, so we have heard the public. They have spoken and the message is clear. Thank you.

PAUL KNAG: Thank you.

SENATOR CASSANO (4TH): Anyone else? Hearing none, we can close the hearing, I assume? Yeah. We'll close the public hearing.

(Gavel)