



**Betsy Gara**  
**Executive Director**  
**Connecticut Council of Small Towns**  
**Before the Labor and Public Employees Committee**  
**February 25, 2020**

Thank you for the opportunity to comment in **opposition** to **HB-5274 - AN ACT STRENGTHENING THE PROBATE COURT SYSTEM**, which makes probate court employees eligible to participate in collective bargaining.

In an effort to significantly reduce costs to ensure the continued sustainability of Connecticut's probate court system, the legislature adopted a sweeping reform measure in 2009 which consolidated the number of probate courts. However, each of the 54 probate districts in the state receives support from the municipalities within the district pursuant to Section 45a-8, CGS. This includes providing the probate courts with office space, furniture, copying machines, document management systems, office supplies, postage, telephone and internet service and property and premises liability insurance. All at considerable cost to the municipalities within the district.

Accordingly, municipalities have a tremendous stake in ensuring that the probate court system remains financially viable so that towns are not required to incur any additional costs or provide additional in-kind contributions to support the system. As such, COST is very concerned with HB-5274, which would significantly increase probate court costs.

In a fiscal note on a similar bill in 2015, the Office of Fiscal Analysis (OFA) concluded that allowing "probate court employees to become a collectively bargained unit or units would result in significant costs, including costs to the Probate Court Administration (PCA), which would need two additional staff to oversee human resources and labor relations for the probate courts at a cost of \$395,093 in FY 16 (\$250,000 for salaries and other expenses and \$145,093 for fringe benefits<sup>1</sup>) and \$411,147 in FY 17 (\$259,525 for salaries and other expenses and \$151,622 for fringe benefits). This cost assumes one unified collective bargaining unit amongst all probate court employees."

However, if the probate courts employees choose to create multiple collective bargaining units, OFA indicated that the bill would "result in significant costs to hire human resources/labor relations staff for the probate courts. It is anticipated that an additional 10 positions would be needed, resulting in a cost of \$964,700 in FY 16 (\$550,000 for salaries and other expenses and \$414,700 for fringe benefits) and \$1,006,962 in FY 17 (\$573,600 for salaries and other expenses and \$433,362 in fringe benefits)."



Given the significant costs associated with this proposal and concerns that this would result in the shifting of a greater burden to municipalities, COST **opposes** HB-5724.

Thank you for your consideration.

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*Founded in 1975, COST is the only organization dedicated exclusively to advocating at the state Capitol on behalf of Connecticut's small towns.*

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