



TESTIMONY
OF THE
CONNECTICUT CONFERENCE OF MUNICIPALITIES
TO THE
LABOR & PUBLIC EMPLOYEES COMMITTEE

March 11, 2010

CCM is Connecticut's statewide association of towns and cities and the voice of local government - your partners in governing Connecticut. Our members represent over 90% of Connecticut's population. We appreciate this opportunity to testify before this joint committee on issues of concern to towns and cities.

HB 5062 (LCO#2283) "An Act Concerning Municipal Arbitration and the Recommendations of the M.O.R.E. Commission"

The proposed substitute language would amend the municipal binding arbitration process from its current panel of arbitrators format – to a single arbitrator system.

Local officials have long-advocated for reforms to the municipal binding arbitration process. **CCM supports the substitute language in HB 5602** as a reasonable approach to streamline the local arbitration process, while also creating opportunities for both parties to achieve savings.

CCM appreciates the hard work the M.O.R.E. Commission has done on this, and several other issues of concern for towns and cities however, we believe additional adjustments are called for, such as:

- a. Modify state-mandated compulsory binding arbitration laws under the Municipal Employee Relations Act (MERA) and the Teacher Negotiation Act (TNA) by maintaining the power of local legislative bodies to reject arbitrated awards by a two-thirds vote, but provide that the contract goes back to negotiation in the event of such a rejection – instead of going to a second, final and binding arbitration panel. In sum, make the system governing municipalities the same as that for the State;
- b. Include the language from HB 5238, which would establish timetables and firm deadlines for municipal negotiations and binding arbitration similar to those used under the TNA;
- c. Ensure certain arbitration criteria be reviewed which takes into account current economic trends and projected data that impedes towns' ability to pay going forward;
- d. Insert a definition of "public interest" that includes an irrebuttable presumption that the public is not willing to increase personnel costs (including salaries and fringe benefits) for Town or Board of Education employees at rates in excess of general fund expenditures for local government services over the average of the last three fiscal years;
- e. Eliminate item-by-item decisions on economic and fringe benefit issues. Instead, ensure that these two separate issues are addressed under their respective categories as a whole;

- f. Ensure the negotiation of fringe benefits involving Town and BOE bargaining units mirror the State process and be conducted on a coalition basis; and
- g. Require that arbitrators not include municipal fund balances under 10% in determining a municipality's ability to pay under the Teacher Negotiation Act (TNA) and Municipal Employees Relations Act (MERA).

Simply put, Connecticut cannot go on conducting business as usual. Whether we like it or not, we are in an era of limits. Our state faces a massive deficit in FY 2012. Every mandate has its constituency -- but it's time to make the difficult decisions necessary so that we will be able to maintain core government services over the next few years. The alternative – not just higher property taxes, but massive layoffs of local government employees – will benefit nobody.

CCM urges the Committee to (1) amend the bill as suggested, and (2) favorably report the HB 5602 (LCO#2283) as a reasonable, comprehensive reform proposal.



If you have any questions, please call Bob Labanara or Ron Thomas of CCM at (203) 498-3000