



**Testimony
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Before the Public Safety & Security Committee
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The Connecticut Council of Small Towns (COST) supports **Proposed HB-6302 AN ACT CONCERNING THE REGIONALIZATION OF CERTAIN PUBLIC SAFETY EMERGENCY TELECOMMUNICATIONS CENTERS AND A STUDY OF CONSOLIDATION.**

Public Safety Answering Points (PSAPs) are facilities operated on a twenty-four hour basis to receive 9-1-1 calls and dispatch emergency response services or transfer or relay 9-1-1 calls to other public safety agencies. Various studies, including feasibility studies conducted by municipalities exploring consolidation options, conclude that PSAP consolidation could result in:

- 1) **Improved quality of service** – Consolidation will ensure that there is a larger pool of dispatchers to provide greater coverage in call centers, particularly during peak hours. In addition, personnel will have more opportunities for training and cross training to enhance professionalism and skills.
- 2) **Increased coordination of emergency services** – Municipalities have found that consolidation enhances communication between personnel and improves the coordination and delivery of emergency services to better meet the needs of the communities served, including responding to storm events and other natural disasters.
- 3) **Long-term cost savings** - Although consolidation efforts may be hindered by up front capital costs, as noted in a policy brief prepared by the Federal Reserve Bank of Boston, there is potential for significant long-term cost savings as well as cost avoidance associated with necessary technology upgrades and the purchase and maintenance of equipment.

Given the benefits associated with PSAP consolidation, many small towns throughout Connecticut are exploring opportunities to consolidate 9-1-1 call centers with neighboring communities. *However, these towns face many barriers to consolidation that should be addressed by the legislation.* These barriers include:

- **Personnel/Labor Issues** – Consolidation is complicated by existing labor contracts which provide different benefits for personnel, including enrollment in different health and pension plans. In some towns, dispatchers provide a wider range of services than in others;



- **Software Compatibility**– Software must be compatible so that information can be seamlessly shared between Computer Aided Dispatch (CAD) software and Record Management System (RMS). Costly software upgrades may be needed to address interoperability and personnel will need to be trained on new systems;
- **Liability Issues** – Questions regarding liability and how costs are apportioned among towns must be addressed;
- **Dark Stations** – In some communities, people continue to rely on the ability to go to the call center to obtain assistance in an emergency or other public safety incident;
- **Lack of Initial Start-up Funding** – The report prepared by the Federal Reserve Bank of Boston concludes that “States can dramatically increase the pace and scope of consolidation by targeting PSAP funds to facilitate local mergers.” Given that local budgets are stretched thin, it is difficult to build community support for consolidation which requires significant upfront capital costs; and
- **Lack of Community Support/Loss of Local Control** – Efforts to consolidate PSAPs in some towns have not been successful because the community did not support consolidation for a variety of reasons.

Although these are major barriers, they are **surmountable barriers** that require time, planning and support to overcome.

COST therefore supports the creation of a task force to address these issues and ensure that recommendations for consolidation:

- 1) Provide realistic timeframes for consolidation;
- 2) Provide a mechanism for resolving personnel, collective bargaining, and other operating issues;
- 3) Provide greater flexibility in determining what constitutes a regional PSAP or multi-town PSAP rather than rigid population and call volume thresholds; and
- 4) Provide support for capital costs in addition to operating costs.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment in support of the bill.