

PA13-163

HB5441

House	4071-4105	35
Labor	399-401, 553-555	6
Senate	4378-4380, 4414-4415	5
		46

H – 1161

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hac/gbr
HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

143
May 15, 2013

Congratulations, Representative Boukus.

Will the Clerk please call Calendar Number 234.

THE CLERK:

Calendar number 234, Substitute House Bill 5441,
on page 43 of today's Calendar. AN ACT AUTHORIZING
CERTAIN EMERGENCY RESPONSE EMPLOYEES TO ENROLL IN THE
MUNICIPAL EMPLOYEES' RETIREMENT SYSTEM AND CREATING A
PUBLIC EMPLOYEE HEALTH PLAN.

DEPUTY SPEAKER SAYERS:

Representative Steinberg.

REP. STEINBERG (136th):

Thank you, Madam -- Madam Speaker.

I would like -- I would ask the Clerk to please
call the amendment. The Clerk has amendment LCO 5591.
I ask the Clerk to call the amendment, and I'd be
granted leave of the Chamber to summarize.

DEPUTY SPEAKER SAYERS:

Will the Clerk please call LCO Number 5591 and it
will be designated House Amendment Schedule "A".

THE CLERK:

House Amendment Schedule "A", LCO 5591, as
introduced by Representative Tercyak and Steinberg.

DEPUTY SPEAKER SAYERS:

The Representative seeks leave of the Chamber to summarize the amendment. Is there any objection to summarization? Is there any objection?

Hearing none, Representative Steinberg, you may proceed with summarization.

REP. STEINBERG (136th):

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

The amendment strikes sections two through five, inclusive of the bill, reducing the bill to section one which is a change to the General Statutes of exactly two words, the definition of regional emergency telecommunications center. These two words are actually very important because it will enable municipalities to create regional emergency telecommunications center which, if anybody is following the deliberations of the M.O.R.E. Commission, it's a clear way to save money for municipalities and create efficiencies.

Our study has indicated that PSAPs, public service -- public safety answering points, are perhaps one of the most efficient low-hanging fruit ways of saving money for municipalities. And this bill would enable municipalities that currently have not taken

hac/gbr
HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

145
May 15, 2013

advantage of regional emergency telecommunications
centers to do so in the future.

DEPUTY SPEAKER SAYERS:

Do you wish to --

REP. STEINBERG (136th):

I move adoption.

DEPUTY SPEAKER SAYERS:

The question before the Chamber is adoption of
House Amendment Schedule "A". Will you remark on the
amendment? Will you remark?

Representative Smith of the 108th.

REP. SMITH (108th):

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

A few questions to the proponent of the
amendment, please.

DEPUTY SPEAKER SAYERS:

Please frame your question, sir.

REP. SMITH (108th):

So just so I understand the amendment, in what's
left of the bill that's before us then is really just
section one. Is that your understanding as well?

Through you, Madam Speaker.

DEPUTY SPEAKER SAYERS:

Representative Steinberg.

hac/gbr
HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

146
May 15, 2013

REP. STEINBERG (136th):

Through you, Madam Speaker.

Yes, the amendment strikes everything except for section one, the change of those two words in the statutes. Everything else has been excised from the bill.

Through you.

DEPUTY SPEAKER SAYERS:

Representative Smith.

REP. SMITH (108th):

And if the gentleman could explain to the Chamber what the -- the purpose of this amendment is and why we need it.

Through you, Madam Speaker.

DEPUTY SPEAKER SAYERS:

Representative Steinberg.

REP. STEINBERG (136th):

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

The purpose of this bill is to enable municipalities for whom their public service answering point is their secondary answering point and not their primary answering point. The statute currently enables municipalities to enroll their employees in

the MERS Insurance Program only if they are the primary answering point.

In many communities the -- the capability for creating a regional emergency telecommunications center, in other words, with several towns as opposed to a single town, resides not in the primary answering point but in the secondary answering point. In many communities that is the fire department as opposed to the police department. This would enable those communities that have their equipment, their capability to create the regional entity to enroll their employees in the MERS Program which they can't do currently.

Through you, Madam Speaker.

DEPUTY SPEAKER SAYERS:

Representative Smith.

REP. SMITH (108th):

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

And thank the gentleman for his answer. Is there any additional cost in doing what was just described to the municipality?

Through you, Madam Speaker.

DEPUTY SPEAKER SAYERS:

Representative Steinberg.

hac/gbr
HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

148
May 15, 2013

REP. STEINBERG (136th):

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

The bill as amended has no fiscal impact and, in fact, ideally will be saving municipalities money if they can create a regional entity.

Through you.

DEPUTY SPEAKER SAYERS:

Representative Smith.

REP. SMITH (108th):

Madam Speaker, the gentleman has described some towns that this may benefit. Through you, if he could identify any towns that he's aware of that would be in need of this type of bill.

Through you, Madam Speaker.

DEPUTY SPEAKER SAYERS:

Representative Steinberg.

REP. STEINBERG (136th):

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

My town, the Town of Westport, has been in negotiations with the Town of New Canaan and Wilton to create such a regional entity. And this obstacle has kept them from doing so up to this point. I can't speak to other communities, but there are currently only eight regional emergency communications --

telecommunications centers in the state of Connecticut. And one could easily argue based upon what we've learned in the M.O.R.E. Commission that more communities would take advantage of this if it was -- if this obstacle was removed.

Through you, Madam Speaker.

DEPUTY SPEAKER SAYERS:

Representative Smith.

REP. SMITH (108th):

So if I understand the gentleman's answer correctly, right now there has been dialogue between some municipalities to create this regional portal, but -- but for this legislation, they are not able to do it. Is that accurate?

Through you, Madam Speaker.

DEPUTY SPEAKER SAYERS:

Representative Steinberg.

REP. STEINBERG (136th):

Through you, Madam Speaker, that is precisely accurate.

DEPUTY SPEAKER SAYERS:

Representative Smith.

REP. SMITH (108th):

In addition to the -- creating the regional portals, could you describe what actually is the -- what's being utilized here? So in other words, is this for 9-1-1 calls or emergency calls or other types of calls?

Through you, Madam Speaker.

DEPUTY SPEAKER SAYERS:

Representative Steinberg.

REP. STEINBERG (136th):

That's an excellent question.

The public safety answering points are the 9-1-1 response capabilities. But in this case, the ability to create a regional center requires specialized equipment and capabilities which, in some cases, do not exist with a primary answer point.

In the Town of Westport the fire department has made a significant investment to create this capability which would actually be able to work for more than one town. And, therefore, by -- by changing this statute, they would be enabled to do something that can't be done by the police department as the primary 9-1-1 answering point.

Through you.

DEPUTY SPEAKER SAYERS:

hac/gbr
HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

151
May 15, 2013

Representative Smith.

REP. SMITH (108th):

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

I'm just curious then in terms of, we'll use the Town of Westport as an example, who may have some of the equipment already, how would the cost sharing be allocated with that scenario with, say, the surrounding towns?

Through you.

DEPUTY SPEAKER SAYERS:

Representative Steinberg.

REP. STEINBERG (136th):

Through you, Madam Speaker, I'm -- I'm really not sure how they divvy it up whether it be just a split by the number of municipalities or it would be on some basis of per capita. Perhaps it might be on the basis of number of responses in a given period, that would be pure speculation on my point.

Through you.

DEPUTY SPEAKER SAYERS:

Representative Smith.

REP. SMITH (108th):

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

I understand the gentleman's answer and I trust it would be speculation at this point, I was just curious if he knew that since there had been some dialogue already in terms of the regionalization of this concept whether that had been discussed. And if it has not been discussed, then I understand that.

But just to dig down a little bit further, had that been discussed as part of the regional process?

Through you.

DEPUTY SPEAKER SAYERS:

DEPUTY SPEAKER SAYERS:

Representative Steinberg.

REP. STEINBERG (136th):

Through you, Madam Speaker, yes, they have had conversations about if they were to work out of one center versus three separate public safety answering points, that there would be significant savings. I think that the -- the discussions only proceeded so far based upon the existing obstacle in the statute. There -- these fine points probably still need to be worked out.

Through you.

DEPUTY SPEAKER SAYERS:

Representative Smith.

hac/gbr
HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

153
May 15, 2013

REP. SMITH (108th):

Madam Speaker, through you, would there be any prohibitions or limitations on the number of towns that would be able to participate in this regional concept?

DEPUTY SPEAKER SAYERS:

Representative Steinberg.

REP. STEINBERG (136th):

I'm sorry, Madam Speaker, could the good gentleman repeat the question, please.

DEPUTY SPEAKER SAYERS:

Representative Smith, if you would please repeat the question.

REP. SMITH (108th):

I'd be happy to, Madam Speaker. My question is whether there would be any prohibition or limitation in the number of towns that would be able to participate in this regional concept?

DEPUTY SPEAKER SAYERS:

Thank you, sir.

Representative Steinberg.

REP. STEINBERG (136th):

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

To my knowledge, there would be no limitation on it. Obviously each municipality would need to determine not only what the benefit would be for them in terms of cost savings, but also the effectiveness and efficiency of their response capability. I imagine there might be an upper limit that is practical, but I don't -- I'm not aware of any legal or fiscal limitations.

Through you.

DEPUTY SPEAKER SAYERS:

Representative Smith.

REP. SMITH (108th):

And, thank you, Madam Speaker.

Just stepping back a little bit to the types of calls that were coming in, so if the town, and again we'll use Westport because I think that's what we're talking about here. If the Town of Westport already has a system where 9-1-1 calls are coming into, say, the police station, and some calls may also then be coming into -- if there was a car accident or something like that, some calls may come into say the fire station. How would this new portal be able to distinguish between which call went to which station?

Through you, Madam Speaker.

hac/gbr
HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

155
May 15, 2013

DEPUTY SPEAKER SAYERS:

Representative Steinberg.

REP. STEINBERG (136th):

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

I'm certainly no expert on exactly how the 9-1-1 calls are handled in every municipality. I do know in the Town of Westport that the primary answering point is the police station, and that is specifically for the speed of response of the police in the case of 9-1-1 emergencies. But there are also a variety of other response needs out there. And the fire department, as I mentioned previously, has created the capability to handle a wide variety of calls through some pretty sophisticated technology. And I'm sure they'd be able to discriminate how to distribute the calls and who would be the most appropriate emergency response people to respond to a specific call.

Through you.

DEPUTY SPEAKER SAYERS:

Representative Smith.

REP. SMITH (108th):

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

I'm just trying to work out in my head here how this all is going to work. So let's assume that this

hac/gbr

156

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

May 15, 2013

bill passes and it gets set up and we now have a regional portal where calls come into it. So for the surrounding towns, say Westport, and I'm trying to think whether you border Fairfield or the surrounding towns in the area. If you had calls coming into the surrounding towns, would all the calls then be directed into this new portal once it's created?

Through you, Madam Speaker.

DEPUTY SPEAKER SAYERS:

Representative Steinberg.

REP. STEINBERG (136th):

Through you, Madam Speaker.

9-1-1 emergency response calls would be directed to this single answering point and then the dispatch capability, the dispatch decision would be made by that answering point, and the appropriate local emergency response people would be -- would respond to that specific call. So, yes, it would be a single point of entry, and then it would be dispatched to the appropriate entities to respond to that call.

Through you.

DEPUTY SPEAKER SAYERS:

Representative Smith.

REP. SMITH (108th):

Thank you.

So I think I'm starting to understand it. So a 9-1-1 call is -- comes in, it goes to the regional center, they identify the purpose of the call, where the call is coming from, who needs to respond to the call whether it be the police or the fire in Fairfield, or the police and the fire in Westport, or some neighboring town. Is that accurate?

Through you, Madam Speaker.

DEPUTY SPEAKER SAYERS:

Representative Steinberg.

REP. STEINBERG (136th):

Through you, Madam Speaker.

To my understanding, that is correct.

Through you.

DEPUTY SPEAKER SAYERS:

Representative Smith.

REP. SMITH (108th):

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

And the personnel, the employees who would then be hired to operate this regional portal, they would then be able to, first of all, who would pay for that -- for the employees and the -- the insurance that

goes with the employees for operating this regional portal?

Through you, Madam Speaker.

DEPUTY SPEAKER SAYERS:

Representative Steinberg.

REP. STEINBERG (136th):

Through you, Madam Speaker.

My understanding is that municipalities would share those costs and that they would also share the -- their contribution costs to the MERS Insurance Program should they be enrolled in that.

Through you, Madam Speaker.

DEPUTY SPEAKER SAYERS:

Representative Smith.

REP. SMITH (108th):

And these employers, if they had worked for the municipality, they would also be entitled then to, obviously they would be paid by the municipality, but they would also be entitled to participate in the MERS Program. Is that accurate?

Through you, Madam Speaker.

DEPUTY SPEAKER SAYERS:

Representative Steinberg.

REP. STEINBERG (136th):

Through you, Madam Speaker.

Yes, my understanding of the statute is if they were enrolled in the MERS Program, it's the municipality that takes responsibility and pays a percentage of that MERS insurance cost. Obviously, the employee also pays a percentage, if I understand your question correctly.

Through you.

DEPUTY SPEAKER SAYERS:

Representative Smith.

REP. SMITH (108th):

And thank you.

It's, you know, it's a little complicated certainly, and we're trying to, at least in my mind, dig down a little bit in terms of if Westport is the host town and the equipment is hosted in Westport, so the calls are coming into Westport, but the employees are shared with say Fairfield and Darien, Norwalk, some surrounding towns -- I haven't been down to Westport for a while, so I need to get down there to remind myself of the surrounding towns. It's such a great area. So I apologize to the good Representative for not being familiar with the neighboring towns.

But if we were to have these neighboring towns and employees from the neighboring towns as well as employees from Westport that is hosting this system, obviously a bill gets sent for the insurance, a bill gets sent for the employees. In my mind, I'm trying to figure out which town is responsible primarily, and then, also, which town would be incrementally responsible based on whatever deal I guess they work out.

That's not the best question I've ever asked, Madam Speaker, but I'm going to try and see if the good gentleman understood it.

Through you.

DEPUTY SPEAKER SAYERS:

Thank you, Representative.

Representative Steinberg.

REP. STEINBERG (136th):

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Through you, if I do understand the question, you'll be the first to tell me. I imagine that each regional emergency telecommunications center has its own set up. And I am not really in a position to speculate as to how they might make their own arrangement other than since the objective is to

hac/gbr
HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

161
May 15, 2013

benefit by sharing services and saving money, that they will work it out to their mutual benefit in that regard.

Through you, Madam Speaker.

DEPUTY SPEAKER SAYERS:

Representative Smith.

REP. SMITH (108th):

And, you know, as you can imagine and I'm sure you're the same way, if we can save the towns money, I'm all for it. If we can save the state money, I'm all for it. If we can help our neighbors and still provide the same services to our citizens and their emergency needs, I'm all for it.

So I just wanted to make sure, and this is why I'm asking the questions I'm asking, that by passing this bill we do not do anything that would jeopardize the safety and security and the needs of our citizens. Other than allowing the emergency telecom center employees the ability to participate in MERS, is there any other benefit that they would receive as a result of this bill?

Through you, Madam Speaker.

DEPUTY SPEAKER SAYERS:

Representative Steinberg.

hac/gbr
HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

162
May 15, 2013

REP. STEINBERG (136th):

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

To my knowledge, no. This bill is very explicit and very simple. This is the explicit benefit.

Through you.

DEPUTY SPEAKER SAYERS:

Representative Smith.

REP. SMITH (108th):

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

And I thank the gentleman for his answers. As indicated previously, I am in favor of saving costs, I'm in favor of the concept of being able to regionalize some of our services and our personnel. It makes sense with today's technology not to have every single town have a single portal when we can do so on a regional basis provided we do so without interrupting and jeopardizing the safety of our citizens.

So I will continue to listen to any other questions my colleagues might have, but at this point, I'll stand in support of the bill but subject to listening to any other comments that may come out.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

DEPUTY SPEAKER SAYERS:

hac/gbr
HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

163
May 15, 2013

Thank you, sir.

Representative Aman.

REP. AMAN (14th):

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

The question of regional dispatch centers has been in front of the Planning and Development Committee many times over the last several years and all of us are looking at them, trying to take a concept that we think is a good concept but the realities of working with it we have found to be much more difficult than the theoretical wouldn't it be great to have one call center instead of three or four.

I do have a couple of questions. It is my understanding from what was said that this particular bill only affects the dispatchers and the MERS system, allowing them to join is what I thought I heard. And as part of that, does it allow the municipality to have the dispatchers in a pension fund other than MERS?

Through you, Madam Speaker.

DEPUTY SPEAKER SAYERS:

Representative Steinberg.

REP. STEINBERG (136th):

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

To my knowledge, since this only changes two words in the statute, it does not have any further implications for enrollment of those employees unless those existed previously.

Through you.

DEPUTY SPEAKER SAYERS:

Representative Aman.

REP. AMAN (14th):

Yes, very often the dispatching centers are using police officers, sometimes full time doing this, sometimes as a fill-in basis. If they have an officer that, for some reason, is on light duty, they'll put them on dispatching. If things -- a dispatcher calls in ill, they will very often bring in a police officer at time and-a-half to fill in on that position.

Especially in the smaller towns, this happens on a fairly frequent basis. The police union sometimes, I believe, is in a different pension plan than the other municipal employees. They may be even receiving a different rate in terms.

Through you, Madam Speaker, how would this bill impact that sort of daily occurrence for the smaller towns?

Through you, Madam Speaker.

DEPUTY SPEAKER SAYERS:

Representative Steinberg.

REP. STEINBERG (136th):

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

I am not familiar with that. This particular bill, as amended, does not address those circumstances. This only has to do with the regional emergency telecommunications center. I really can't answer that question further.

Through you.

DEPUTY SPEAKER SAYERS:

Representative Aman.

REP. AMAN (14th):

Yes, line 7 talks about the receipt and processing of 9-1-1 calls which is very, very specific statement that it is 9-1-1 calls. Most dispatching centers that I'm aware of also handle all sorts of routine calls that come in on a regular number, not through 9-1-1. The way I'm reading this, it appears that these regional dispatch centers are only able to handle 9-1-1 calls.

Through you, Madam Speaker, is that a correct interpretation?

hac/gbr
HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

166
May 15, 2013

DEPUTY SPEAKER SAYERS:

Representative Steinberg.

REP. STEINBERG (136th):

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Through you, I don't see the word only in the statute so I'm not sure that you can draw that conclusion.

Through you.

DEPUTY SPEAKER SAYERS:

Representative Aman.

REP. AMAN (14th):

Yes, then for legislative intent would I be reading that for the receipt and processing of 9-1-1 calls and any other call that a dispatch center may receive?

Through you, Madam Speaker.

DEPUTY SPEAKER SAYERS:

Representative Steinberg.

REP. STEINBERG (136th):

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Through you, again, this refers explicitly to the 9-1-1 calls. I would not necessarily know how various regional emergency telecommunications centers handle any other calls.

Through you.

DEPUTY SPEAKER SAYERS:

Representative Aman.

REP. AMAN (14th):

Yes, the last part of the bill calls for at least three municipalities. And while I can understand if it's being designed for Westport why someone might have wrote it that way. But most of the regional legislation that we have written usually talks about two or more municipalities. Some of the state statutes have been written saying that anything -- any one municipality can do, any two or more can do. And, through you, Madam Speaker, I'm wondering why that language wasn't used and yet it's very clear that it's three municipalities and not two that may happen to go together.

Through you, Madam Speaker.

DEPUTY SPEAKER SAYERS:

Representative Steinberg.

REP. STEINBERG (136th):

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

I, too, have wondered about that specific wording, but since that was part of the existing underlying statute, I wasn't around that when was

hac/gbr
HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

168
May 15, 2013

passed. Maybe we could find out from somebody who was here at that time, but the definition is three. Two or more versus three, I'm not exactly sure why that's a huge distinction.

Through you.

DEPUTY SPEAKER SAYERS:

Representative Aman.

REP. AMAN (14th):

Yes, and again, this is probably older language, but one of the things that has been talked about on regional systems is that what some of the police departments and emergency dispatchers are talking about doing is having the dispatching done electronically. No longer do dispatchers need to be sitting next to each other. So the various police departments could have a dispatcher sitting in their police department, monitoring prisoners, doing the other routine tasks, and yet, the calls could be rotated or moved through the system. And the way I'm looking at this, it seems like it's been written that the dispatchers would be in the same location.

And again, for legislative intent, is that the definition of a regional telecommunications center or does this give the municipalities the flexibility to

hac/gbr
HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

169
May 15, 2013

actually have their dispatchers in a variety of
different physical locations?

Through you, Madam Speaker.

DEPUTY SPEAKER SAYERS:

Representative Steinberg.

REP. STEINBERG (136th):

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Through you, I won't pretend to be expert on the latest practices or technologies that may be available to public safety answering points. Again, all we're amending here are two words in this bill to enable municipalities with their secondary answering points, so that's where their equipment and capability is.

I imagine each regional emergency telecommunications center would evaluate their options and come up with the best plan that would meet the needs of their municipalities.

Through you.

DEPUTY SPEAKER SAYERS:

Representative Aman.

REP. AMAN (14th):

Yes, so going back just to the two words, and for people watching on television, we're talking about taking the word out an, a-n, and adding the word any,

hac/gbr
HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

170
May 15, 2013

a-n-y. And I'm just wondering, since we're spending a lot of time talking about this, what is the real difference between an and any in this context? It seems like it was written much the way we do some of what we refer to as a dummy bill that there is such a minor change that it's almost meaningless.

Through you, Madam Speaker.

DEPUTY SPEAKER SAYERS:

Representative Steinberg.

REP. STEINBERG (136th):

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

I guess this is, thank you for bringing this up, it's important that we talk about the two words and their ramifications. Changing an to any, and then the other word that's important is going from the to a, means that rather than just the primary 9-1-1 response capability can be -- can enroll their employees in the MERS Program. A secondary public safety answering point can also do so which would enable the secondary answering points to enroll their employees and create these regional entities.

As the statute exists now if you just say an and the, it limits it to just that primary answering point and many municipalities will never be in a position to

hac/gbr
HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

171
May 15, 2013

create such a regional emergency telecommunications center.

So I thank the good Representative for clarifying this because that's the -- indeed, the important and not trivial distinction that's part of this bill.

Thank you.

Through you.

DEPUTY SPEAKER SAYERS:

Representative Aman.

REP. AMAN (14th):

Yes, I thank the proponent for the bill.

Again, anything we can do to encourage municipalities to work together, anything that we can do to reduce the impediments of working together. I know that having been involved on this, this is the sort of thing that town attorneys look at and then turn to their governing bodies and say you don't want to go there because this could be interpreted in fairly different ways.

So the bill has come forward. I think it probably as expressed will encourage municipalities to do it. If that's the end result, it is a good idea.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

DEPUTY SPEAKER SAYERS:

hac/gbr
HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

172
May 15, 2013

Thank you, Representative.

Representative Phil Miller of the 36th.

Will you remark further on the amendment that is before us? Will you remark further?

If not, let me try your minds. All those in favor, signify by saying Aye.

REPRESENTATIVES:

Aye.

DEPUTY SPEAKER SAYERS:

All those opposed, Nay.

REPRESENTATIVES:

Nay.

DEPUTY SPEAKER SAYERS:

The amendment passes.

Will you remark further on the bill as amended?

Will you remark further on the bill as amended?

Representative Smith of the 108th.

REP. SMITH (108th):

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Just one additional question, since the bill now has become the amendment, or the amendment has now become the bill, however you want to look at it, my question is if an employee for the town already participates in MERS and they create this regional

agency and works as part of that agency as well, is there any type of an ability to collect twice or, I hate to say double dip, but somehow abuse the system such that now they're able to share more than they should have?

Through you, Madam Speaker.

DEPUTY SPEAKER SAYERS:

Representative Steinberg.

REP. STEINBERG (136th):

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Through you, I'm not an expert on the MERS Insurance System, but I sure hope there wouldn't be any such possibility of collecting twice. And I imagine since the municipality has to contribute to the MERS Insurance Program, they'd be very much aware of exactly what their expenses and would, since they're seeking to save money, make sure that would never occur.

Through you.

DEPUTY SPEAKER SAYERS:

Representative Smith.

REP. SMITH (108th):

Yeah, I thank the gentleman for his answers and for the legislative purpose or intent here is, you

know, certainly the -- at least my intent is -- would -- to support this bill is that that would not be the case. That, you know, you're only able to participate once, collect once, and, you know, there's no double-dipping. So I thank the gentleman for his answers. I ask my colleagues to support this bill. We've talked about lowering some of our costs, I think this is a step in that direction.

Regionalization is one of these types of things that has good points and bad points. We've heard some of the questions that have been asked here today. I think the kinks, perhaps, can get worked out once the towns start doing it. We are concerned about the dispatching and making sure the citizens are safe. But assuming we can rectify those issues, I don't think the State should get in the way of allowing towns to work together. So I support the bill.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

DEPUTY SPEAKER SAYERS:

Thank you, Representative.

Representative Shaban of the 135th.

REP. SHABAN (135th):

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

I rise in support of the bill. I just really want to make a comment here. It -- there's another MERS bill in the hopper that's been kind of working its way through the system. And this discussion kind of triggers the issues there. Our towns have been laboring, not laboring. Our towns have been working with the same cost-to-division structure that has been in place for almost 60 years. And, you know, one of the -- actually some of the testimony on this bill, I think from COST I believe it was, I forget who, flagged that. So, you know, while this is a good bill, this is a good idea, it's a way to promote a couple of positive things like the Chairman and Representative Steinberg and the Ranking Member said. I think we need to keep an eyeball on the fact that the MERS system itself need some repair. So I'm going to support the bill, but I just wanted to flag that issue hopefully for a later discussion.

Thank you.

DEPUTY SPEAKER SAYERS:

Will you remark? Will you remark further on the bill as amended? Will you remark?

hac/gbr
HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

176
May 15, 2013

If not, will staff and guests please come to the well of the House, will members take their seats, and the machine will be open.

THE CLERK:

The House of Representatives is voting by roll.

The House of Representatives is voting by roll. Will members please return to the chamber immediately.

DEPUTY SPEAKER SAYERS:

Have all the members voted? Have all the members voted?

Please check the board to see if your vote has been properly cast.

If all the members have voted, the machine will be locked and the Clerk will take a tally.

The Clerk will announce the tally

THE CLERK:

Yes, Madam Speaker.

On Bill Number 5441:

Total number voting -- as amended by House "A",

I'm sorry.

Total number voting	141
Necessary for passage	71
Those voting Yea	141
Those voting Nay	0

hac/gbr
HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

177
May 15, 2013

Absent and not voting 9

DEPUTY SPEAKER SAYERS:

The bill as amended passes.

DEPUTY SPEAKER SAYERS:

Will the clerk please call Calendar Number 480.

THE CLERK:

Yes, on page 50 of today's Calendar, Calendar Number 480, favorable report of the Joint Standing Committee on Planning and Development, substitute House Bill 6683, AN ACT CONCERNING THE ABATEMENT OF PUBLIC NUISANCES.

DEPUTY SPEAKER SAYERS:

Representative Grogins.

REP. GROGINS (129th):

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

I move for acceptance to the Joint Committee's favorable report and passage of the bill.

DEPUTY SPEAKER SAYERS:

The question is on acceptance of the Joint Committee's favorable report and passage of the bill.

Representative, you have floor, sir?

REP. GROGINS (129th):

May I summarize, Madam Speaker?

DEPUTY SPEAKER SAYERS:

S - 665

**CONNECTICUT
GENERAL ASSEMBLY
SENATE**

**PROCEEDINGS
2013**

**VOL. 56
PART 14
4130 - 4472**

gdm/cah/meb/gbr
SENATE

123
June 1, 2013

Thank you, Senator.

Will you remark further on the bill? Will you remark further on the bill?

If not, Senator Maynard.

SENATOR MAYNARD:

Thank you, Mr. President.

If there's no objection, I'd ask that it be added to the Consent Calendar.

THE CHAIR:

Without objection, so ordered.

Mr. Clerk.

Senator Looney.

SENATOR LOONEY:

Thank you, Madam -- Mr. President.

Mr. President, if the Clerk would call as the next item Calendar page 18, Calendar 617, House Bill 5441, to be followed by Calendar page 19, Calendar 624, House Bill 6151.

THE CHAIR:

Mr. Clerk.

THE CLERK:

On page 18, Calendar 617, Substitute for House Bill Number 5441, AN ACT AUTHORIZING CERTAIN EMERGENCY RESPONSE EMPLOYEES TO ENROLL IN THE MUNICIPAL EMPLOYEES' RETIREMENT SYSTEM, Favorable Report of the Committee on Planning and Development.

THE CHAIR:

Senator Osten.

gdm/cah/meb/gbr
SENATE

124
June 1, 2013

SENATOR OSTEN:

Thank you very much, Mr. President.

I move acceptance of the Joint Committee's Favorable Report and passage of the bill.

THE CHAIR:

On acceptance and passage, will you remark?

SENATOR OSTEN:

Thank you very much.

This bill here was sent from Planning and Development having cognizance by the Labor Committee. And it -- it is inline with the regionalization that we are looking towards. And it allows municipal employees' retirement system to have those people who are involved in PSAPs to participate in that retirement system.

THE CHAIR:

Will you remark further on the bill?

Senator Markley.

SENATOR MARKLEY:

Thank you, Mr. President.

I rise in support of this bill. I'm not -- not so much that I'm a great fan of regionalization but I think it makes sense sometimes when voluntarily under -- undertaken amid -- among municipalities. In this case we have smaller towns which -- for whom it makes sense to combine their emergency response system. But those employees have been, kind of, in a twilight zone as far as where their pensions would be paid. This would put that under the (inaudible) system and have the support of -- of COST, the organization of small towns, and we had no opposition to this bill. So I support it and I hope that it will have the support of the Circle.

THE CHAIR:

gdm/cah/meb/gbr
SENATE

125
June 1, 2013

Thank you, Senator.

Will you remark further on the bill? Will you remark further on the bill?

Senator Osten.

SENATOR OSTEN:

With no objection, I would remove this to the Consent Calendar.

THE CHAIR:

Without objection, so ordered.

Mr. Clerk.

THE CLERK:

On page 19, Calendar 624, Substitute for House Bill Number 6151, AN ACT CONCERNING CERTAIN OPERATORS OF MOTOR VEHICLES AND ELIGIBILITY FOR UNEMPLOYMENT BENEFITS, Favorable Report of the Committee on Labor and Public Employees.

Senator Osten.

SENATOR OSTEN:

Thank you very much, Mr. President.

I move acceptance of the Joint Committee's Favorable Report and passage of the bill as amended by the House.

THE CHAIR:

On acceptance and passage of the bill, will you remark?

SENATOR OSTEN:

This particular situation has been -- although I haven't been here -- hanging around for a number of years. This creates an exception in the workers' compensation statutes for owner/operators of motor vehicles with a minimum gross vehicle weight, and allows them to act as -- as they are, independents.

gdm/cah/meb/gbr
SENATE

159
June 1, 2013

Thank you, Madam President.

Madam President, if the Clerk would list the items on the first Consent Calendar and then if we might call for a vote on that Consent Calendar.

THE CHAIR:

Thank you.

Mr. Clerk.

It's not open, I'm not opening it. I'm waiting for you to call the (inaudible).

THE CLERK:

On Page 3, Calendar 209, Senate Bill 1033.

Page 5, Calendar 355, House Bill 6023.

Page 7, Calendar 460, House Bill 6506.

On Page 11, Calendar 505, House Bill 6406.

On Page 18, Calendar 617, House Bill 5441; Calendar 620, House Bill 6683; Calendar 623, House Bill 6365.

And on Page 19, Calendar 624, House Bill 6151.

On Page 20, Calendar 635, House Bill 5926.

Page 23, Calendar 659, House Bill 5358.

On Page 26, Calendar 680, House Bill 5666.

And on Page 29, Calendar 182, Senate Bill 1000.

Page 33, Calendar 384, Senate Bill 1067.

And on Page 36, Calendar 649, House Bill 5113.

THE CHAIR:

Thank you.

gdm/cah/meb/gbr
SENATE

160
June 1, 2013

Mr. Clerk, will you call for a roll call vote and the machine will be open.

THE CLERK:

Immediate roll call has been ordered in the Senate.
Senators please return to the Chamber. Immediate roll call on Consent Calendar Number 1 has been ordered in the Senate.

THE CHAIR:

If all members have voted, if all members have voted, the machine will be closed.

Mr. Clerk, will you please call a tally.

THE CLERK:

On the first Consent Calendar of the day.

Total Number Voting	35	
Necessary for Adoption	18	
Those Voting Yea	35	
Those Voting Nay	0	
Those Absent and Not Voting		1

THE CHAIR:

Consent Calendar passes.

Senator Looney.

SENATOR LOONEY:

Thank you, Madam President.

Madam President, if the Clerk would please call as the next item Calendar Page 10, Calendar 495, Senate Bill 840 from the Finance, Revenue and Bonding Committee.

THE CHAIR:

Good evening, Senator Fonfara.

SENATOR FONFARA:

**JOINT
STANDING
COMMITTEE
HEARINGS**

**LABOR AND
PUBLIC EMPLOYEES
PART 2
365 - 714**

2013

Representative Steinberg.

REP. STEINBERG: Good afternoon, Senator Osten, Representative Tercyak, Senator Markley and Representative Smith, thank you for allowing me to testify. On behalf of House Bill 5441, A PROPOSED AMENDMENT TO SECTION 7-425 OF THE GENERAL STATUTES RELATING TO EMPLOYEE ELIGIBILITY TO ENROLL IN THE MUNICIPAL EMPLOYEES RETIREMENT SYSTEM, THE MERS SYSTEM.

We as the State of Connecticut talk often about how we want to promote regionalization. It's a way to improve efficiencies, often to save money for the state and for the municipalities, and the Town of Westport, which I represent, seeks to achieve greater efficiency and effectiveness through the creation of a Regional Emergency Response Center, an RETC, serving at least three communities. They've already made entreaties to the Towns of Wilton and New Canaan. They're very interested in doing this. We have our three municipalities. We'd all be fine qualifying as per the statute except for one, I would submit, minor obstacle.

Currently under Section 7-425 of the statutes only the Public Safety Answering Point, the PSAP, is responsible for receipt and processing of 9-1-1 calls, is eligible for enrolling their employees in MERS. It sounds logical on its face, but in Westport's case it's the police department that's the primary 9-1-1 contact point, not the fire EMS department which wants to create this regional dispatch capability. As it turns out in the towns of Wilton and New Canaan it's also the fire department that has that kind of capability.

So we have three communities that are eager to regional to create efficiency, but they are not

able to enroll in the MERS program. Why is that important to these communities? If they're going to be a regional entity, it makes more sense to be in the MERS program than the individual municipal contract situations. All we need to do is change effectively two words in the statute. Change "the" to "any" and change "the" to "a" as you can see on page 2 of my testimony. I'll read it to you explicitly. "To establish any entity authorized by the Department of Public Safety as a public answering point responsible for the receipt and processing of 9-1-1 calls for at least three municipalities."

So all I'm asking for, it seems very straightforward since this is enabling legislation. It's up to the municipality to choose to enroll in the MERS program. It is not a mandate. There is no fiscal impact to the state. It would allow three municipalities to do what the state has been encouraging them to do which is create a regional dispatch capability.

So I hope we can count on your support for this, and I'm glad to answer any questions.

SENATOR OSTEN: Are there any questions for the good representative?

Representative Tercyak.

REP. TERCYAK: Thank you very much. It's a nice proposal. Should we be extending the municipal health insurance as well as the retirement benefits to regional --

REP. STEINBERG: That's a good question, Representative. The chief in my fire department is most focused on the retirement

plan, but I think you raise a good point. If this is policy for the state, if we're seeking regionalization, we should be doing what we can to promote it across all the reasonable areas, particularly we're creating these nonmunicipal entities. It's not something I'm an expert on, but I think it's worth exploring.

REP. TERCYAK: Thank you very much.

Thank you, Madam Chair.

SENATOR OSTEN: Any further questions?

Seeing none, thank you very much.

And our next person to be up -- we're now done with the public officials. We're on to Marilyn Cruz-Aponte followed by Rich Pokorski, and I apologize for names.

Thank you for coming.

MARILYNN CRUZ-APONTE: Thank you, Senator Osten and Representative Tercyak and members of the committee. My name is Marilyn Cruz-Aponte. I'm speaking in support of Senate Bill 704, AN ACT CONCERNING RETIREMENT DEFINITIONS OF MUNICIPALITIES AND PARTICIPATING MUNICIPALITIES.

In July 2011, legal counsel of the retirement division of the office of the comptroller issued an administrative interpretation known as "The Employer's Guide to CMERS," offering guidance as relates to implementation of Connecticut Statute 7-438, and this is the statute that deals with the continuation of retirement allowance upon other public employment participation in state retirement system and reemployment by participating



**Testimony
Betsy Gara
Executive Director
Connecticut Council of Small Towns
Before the
Labor Committee
February 19, 2013**

RE: HB-5441- AN ACT AUTHORIZING CERTAIN EMERGENCY RESPONSE EMPLOYEES TO ENROLL IN THE MUNICIPAL EMPLOYEES RETIREMENT SYSTEM.

HB-5441 would allow emergency response employees other than those designated as part of a primary 9-1-1 answering point to be eligible to enroll in the municipal employees retirement system.

COST supports the intent of HB-5441 which would remove obstacles to participating in regional emergency dispatch operations. However, we recommend that the committee also address concerns associated with funding the Municipal Employees Retirement System to ensure its continued viability.

Under current law, the State Employees Retirement Commission is authorized to increase employer contribution rates and has done so on eleven occasions in the past 12 years. However the employee contribution rate is set in statute and has not been increased since its inception. As a result, municipal employers are shouldering an increasingly larger burden in funding the system. In 2002, the employer-employee contribution ratio was 55% municipality/45% employee. By July 2013, the ratio will be 82% municipality/18% employee. This contribution ratio is creating an unsustainable system.

To ensure the continued financial viability of the system, Connecticut must adjust the employee contribution rate and more equitably fund the Municipal Employee Retirement System.

COST recommends amending the statutorily set employee contributions to the Municipal Employee Retirement System by increasing such contributions by 1% annually over the next three years-to total employee contribution to MERS of 5.25%.



State of Connecticut
 HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
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 HARTFORD, CONNECTICUT 06106-1591

Page 4
 Line 12

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Testimony in Support of HB 5441

**An Act Authorizing Certain Emergency Response Employees to Enroll
 in the Municipal Employees Retirement System**

Labor and Public Employees Committee

February 19, 2013

Senator Osten, Representative Tercyak, Senator Markley, Representative Smith and members of the Labor and Public Employees Committee. Thank you for the opportunity to testify in support of HB 5441, a proposed amendment to section 7-425 of the general statutes pertaining to employee eligibility to enroll in the municipal employees retirement system (MERS).

The State of Connecticut has sought to improve efficiencies – and save money -- through greater regionalization, where appropriate. The Town of Westport, which I represent, seeks to achieve greater efficiency and effectiveness through the creation of a “Regional Emergency Response Center” (RETC), serving at least three communities. Negotiations have already taken place with the neighboring towns of Wilton and New Canaan, which are eager to participate.

However, the new regional emergency telecommunications center hasn’t been created because of an unintended obstacle. As section 7-425 of the statutes is currently written, only *the* “Public Safety Answering Point” (PSAP) responsible for the receipt and processing of 9-1-1 calls, meaning that the dispatch entity must be the *first point* of reception. In Westport’s case, it’s the Police Department which is the primary contact point for 9-1-1 calls, not the Fire/EMS Department, which would handle the PSAP responsibilities. As the statute would be interpreted, the new dispatch entity would be considered an “Equipped Secondary Answering Point,” and its employees would be ineligible for MERS enrollment.

Why can't Westport's Police Department create such a dispatch entity? It could, but the other municipalities interested in participating in the regional center also plan to involve their Fire departments, so it would be much more straightforward to create the entity under that department's auspices. The other interested towns have the same issue as Westport does: their Police Departments are the primary answering points, but the Fire Departments are the dispatch points.

HB5441 affords municipalities entered into such a dispatch capability the option to participate in the MERS program, so it is enabling legislation rather than a mandate. Municipalities which decide to participate would be liable for a portion of enrolled employees' share of the contribution to MERS. Thus, there is *no fiscal impact to the State*. At last check, there are eight RETCs across the state, with roughly 120 employees enrolled in MERS.

Changing just a few words in the statute, specifically to establish "any entity authorized by the Department of Public Safety as a public answering point responsible for the receipt and processing of 9-1-1 call for at least three municipalities" will do the trick.

I respectfully entreat the Committee to consider such a minor change, in the interests of achieving the sort of efficient regionalization which Connecticut has long espoused. Thank you.