



2020 LEGISLATIVE PRIORITIES

- Immediately adopt a bond package that provides level funding for Town Aid Road, the Local Capital Improvement Program (LoCIP), Grants for Municipal Projects, and other critical municipal grant programs;
- Provide towns with more predictable revenue streams and greater fiscal stability by (1) releasing municipal aid on time; (2) rejecting efforts to shift teachers' pension costs to towns; (3) providing towns with the tools to control education spending; (4) continuing to prohibit midyear cuts in municipal funding; and (5) rejecting efforts to enact or expand property tax exemptions or caps;
- Address public safety concerns by assisting towns in removing dead and decaying trees along local roads and other public areas;
- Strengthen economic development opportunities in small towns by (1) enhancing Internet connectivity and reliability by expanding access to high-speed broadband networks in all communities and facilitating the deployment of 5G technology; (2) supporting continued funding for the Small Town Economic Assistance Program (STEAP); (3) investing in critical local infrastructure and historic preservation; and (4) promoting tourism throughout Connecticut;
- Assist towns in complying with environmental mandates, including stormwater management, recycling and solid waste management; and
- Provide towns with meaningful relief from unfunded mandates, including prevailing wage requirements, and refrain from adopting any new unfunded mandates.







PROVIDE TOWNS WITH THE TOOLS TO MANAGE LOCAL BUDGETS

- 1) Continue to prohibit midyear reductions or other lapses in municipal funding which undermine local budgets and the delivery of critical services;
- 2) Reject efforts to shift teachers' pension costs to municipalities, which have had no role in managing pension funds or in deferring contributions that have resulted in millions of dollars in unfunded pension liabilities;
- 3) Provide towns with greater authority to manage local budgets and respond to changes in municipal funding by: a) providing towns with greater flexibility to reduce education spending under the Municipal Budget Requirement (MBR); and b) Allowing towns to reopen collective bargaining agreements to negotiate savings if education aid is reduced by a significant percentage or changes are needed to facilitate consolidation/shared services agreements;
- 4) Establish an irrebuttable presumption that a municipality's budget reserve of 15% or less is not available to pay the costs of any item subject to municipal binding arbitration;
- 5) Refrain from adopting any new or expanded property tax exemptions or caps which shift a greater burden onto homeowners; and
- 6) Provide towns with stable, alternative revenue sources, such as authorizing towns to charge a fee for tax exempt properties equal to the services provided for police, fire, emergency services and roads.

REVITALIZE LOCAL ECONOMIES & SUPPORT INFRASTRUCTURE INVESTMENT

- 1) Support investment in local infrastructure by prioritizing the release of funding for the Town Aid Road, the Local Bridge program, the Local Capital Improvement Program (LoCIP), and the Local Transportation Capital Improvement Program (LOTICIP);
- 2) Support continued funding for the Small Town Economic Assistance Program (STEAP) to help strengthen local economies;
- 3) Remove regulatory barriers to sanitary sewer extension projects needed to support housing and economic development;
- 4) Eliminate burdensome training requirements associated with the Small Cities Community Development Block Grant program;
- 5) Enhance Internet connectivity and reliability by expanding access to high speed broadband networks in all communities and facilitating the deployment of 5G technology;
- 6) Enhance opportunities to revitalize communities by expanding the Historic Preservation Tax Credit and brownfields remediation programs; and
- 7) Create a sustainable source of funding to support tourism in Connecticut.

ENACT MEANINGFUL MANDATE RELIEF

- 1) Refrain from adopting any new or expanded unfunded mandates that drive up the cost of local government;
- 2) Ensure that the Office of Fiscal Analysis seeks input from COST and other municipal organizations in determining



- the fiscal impact of a legislative proposal on municipalities;
- 3) Provide towns with greater flexibility to reduce education spending under the Minimum Budget Requirement (MBR);
 - 4) Assist towns in complying with the MS4 Stormwater General Permit by reducing burdensome paperwork requirements, providing towns with greater flexibility to meet requirements, and targeting grants and training to assist towns in compliance;
 - 5) Eliminate the requirement that towns publish legal notices in newspapers and allow towns to post such notices on their municipal websites, consistent with state courts and state agencies.
 - 6) Reduce construction costs for municipal projects by a) increasing the \$50,000 project threshold for municipal set aside requirements; b) revising the prevailing wage threshold for municipal public works renovation projects to \$500,000; and c) exempting donated labor/services from the prevailing wage laws;
 - 7) Exempt school districts that receive less than 3% in ECS grants from certain state educational mandates; and
 - 8) Enact modest changes to binding arbitration laws to reduce costs for property taxpayers, including allowing parties to mutually agree to have their case heard by a single neutral arbitrator randomly appointed from a panel of neutral arbitrators by the State Board of Mediation.

FACILITATE THE USE OF COST-EFFECTIVE REGIONAL/SHARED SERVICES PROGRAMS

- 1) Ensure that there is a mechanism to address collective bargaining issues that undermine regional consolidation efforts or shared services agreements, including providing that consolidation/regionalization efforts are not a mandatory subject of collective bargaining;
- 2) Assist municipalities in facilitating the regional consolidation of services, such as 911 Public Safety Answering Points (PSAPs), to achieve savings and improve capability by addressing statutory and other barriers to consolidation;
- 3) Reject efforts to modify E-911 funding by capping regional PSAP subsidies, which will undermine efforts to consolidate PSAPs;
- 4) Reject efforts to force the consolidation of services/programs without first performing a comprehensive cost-benefit analysis;
- 5) Restore funding for the Intertown Capital Equipment program and Regional Performance Incentive Program, which supports regional/shared services programs; and
- 6) Continue to support the delivery of regional/shared services programs through the Councils of Government (COGs).



SUPPORT FAIR SHARE EDUCATION FUNDING

- 1) Reaffirm the state's constitutional obligation to fund education for all students; and
- 2) Assist towns in managing special education costs by a) exploring options to allow municipalities to participate in a special education predictable cost cooperative; b) authorizing Regional Education Service Centers to provide increased special education services to school districts; c) lowering the reimbursement threshold; d) shifting the burden of proof in special education hearings from the school district to the claimant, consistent with federal standards; and e) requiring the state to pay 100% of the costs of special education for severe-needs students.

ASSIST REGIONAL SCHOOL DISTRICTS IN CONTROLLING EDUCATION COSTS

- 1) Require, rather than allow, regional school districts to establish finance boards consisting of representatives from member towns to provide input on local budget issues;
- 2) Allow the use of a five-year rolling average for determining Average Daily Membership in regional schools for purposes of calculating member town allocation; and
- 3) Provide towns in regional school districts with greater oversight of collective bargaining agreements by requiring that such agreements be approved by each local governing body.

PROMOTE SAVINGS & EFFICIENCIES IN EDUCATION

- 1) Provide towns with greater authority to manage local budgets and respond to changes in municipal funding by: a) providing towns with greater flexibility to reduce education spending under the Municipal Budget Requirement (MBR); and b) Allowing towns to reopen collective bargaining agreements to negotiate savings if education aid is reduced by a significant percentage or changes are needed to facilitate consolidation/shared services agreements;
- 2) Ensure that local and regional boards of education are required to adhere to the requirements of the Uniform Chart of Accounts to provide municipal officials and taxpayers with greater transparency regarding education spending and the ability to compare spending levels across categories;
- 3) Require each local board of education to use, and comply with, all purchasing procedures used by the municipality where the board is located, regardless of any conflicting special act, municipal charter, or home rule ordinance;
- 4) Prohibit boards of education from hiring any administrative personnel for positions which are not included in the proposed and adopted budget without town concurrence; and
- 5) Provide incentives to ensure that municipalities and boards of education work together to consolidate non-educational expenditures/functions to improve efficiencies and reduce costs.



STRENGTHEN PUBLIC HEALTH & SAFETY IN OUR COMMUNITIES

- 1) Protect the viability of the Resident State Trooper program and expand efforts to allow towns to share Resident State Troopers or partner with other local law enforcement agencies;
- 2) Assist towns in funding, sharing equipment, and securing contractors to remove dead or decaying trees along local roads and other areas;
- 3) Strengthen criminal laws to address car thefts and break-ins by juveniles;
- 4) Continue to support programs to address opioid abuse, including establishing an Office of Alcohol and Drug Policy;
- 5) Reject efforts to force consolidation of local and regional health districts and impose fees on towns to fund consolidation;
- 6) Ensure that there are adequate resources to support training for volunteer first responders; and
- 7) Continue to assist communities affected by crumbling foundations by extending the life of the Captive insurance organization, providing additional funds for testing and remediation, including testing of municipal and school buildings.

ASSIST TOWNS IN MEETING ENVIRONMENTAL GOALS

- 1) Assist towns in complying with the MS4 Stormwater General Permit by reducing burdensome paperwork requirements, providing towns with greater flexibility to meet requirements, and targeting grants and training to assist towns in compliance;

- 2) Address concerns regarding increasing municipal recycling costs by increasing the bottle deposit fee;
- 3) Reduce the impact of road salt and deicing chemicals on water supplies and equipment by encouraging Green Snow Pro training and certification which adheres to Best Management Practices; and
- 4) Require the state Department of Energy & Environmental Protection to provide potable water to residents whose private wells have been impaired due to road salt and deicing chemicals.

ASSIST TOWNS IN ADDRESSING HOUSING NEEDS

- 1) Develop guidelines to assist municipalities in complying with existing affordable housing planning requirements;
- 2) Provide towns with greater flexibility in meeting the state's affordable housing goals; and
- 3) Remove regulatory barriers for sanitary sewer extension projects needed to support housing and economic development.

Founded in 1975, COST is the state's only organization dedicated exclusively to representing the interests of Connecticut's smaller towns at the state Capitol. COST marshals the collective talent, experience, and vision of municipal leaders to help shape public policies in ways that help Connecticut's smaller communities control property tax levels and provide critical services to residents.

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