



2023
Legislative Platform





2023 LEGISLATIVE PRIORITIES

LOCAL BUDGETS & PROPERTY TAXES

- Increase municipal aid to keep pace with inflation and continue to release municipal aid in a timely manner.
- Increase funding for the Local Bridge Program to assist municipalities in improving the safety of bridges and culverts.
- Ensure that the state provides adequate funding to reimburse municipalities for lost revenues under the car tax cap.
- Refrain from adopting any new or expanded property tax exemptions or caps which shift a greater burden onto homeowners and businesses.

EDUCATION

- Increase Education Cost Sharing (ECS) funding to address inflation costs affecting the delivery of services and ensure that changes to the ECS formula do not negatively impact funding for small towns.
- Increase special education funding to ensure that recently enacted tiered reimbursement levels do not result in decreases in funding to some school districts.
- Modify the school construction formula to allow municipalities to use federal funds to assist school districts in upgrading systems to improve indoor air quality and increase state funding for such upgrades.
- Provide towns with greater flexibility and certainty under the Minimum Budget Requirement to help them reduce education spending.

REGIONAL/SHARED SERVICES

- Support efforts to facilitate cost effective regional/shared services programs by authorizing the use of coalition collective bargaining or otherwise addressing collective bargaining issues that are an impediment to consolidation/regionalization.

ENVIRONMENT

- Develop and implement statewide, enforceable policies to enhance municipal solid waste management, including a) food waste diversion programs at schools and other institutions; b) glass only recycling; c) Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR)



programs; d) Pay as You Throw programs; and e) organics collection, including streamlining the permitting process for facilities.

- Develop and implement long-term, sustainable solutions for managing municipal solid waste instead of relying on shipping waste out of state.

HOUSING

- Assist municipalities in supporting affordable housing, transit-oriented development, and mixed use development without imposing state mandates or penalizing municipalities by making them ineligible for discretionary grants.

MANDATE RELIEF

- 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.
- Develop a defined contribution plan for new hires under the Municipal Employees Retirement System.
- Increase the prevailing wage threshold for new municipal public works projects from \$1 million to \$3 million and for renovations from \$100,000 to \$500,000.

PUBLIC HEALTH & SAFETY

- Increase Medicaid reimbursement levels to provide greater support for ambulance services.
- Enhance the state's Resident Trooper program to ensure the continued viability of the program, including providing municipalities with greater predictability regarding annual costs.
- Continue to enhance efforts to address the state's opioid crisis, including developing effective local and regional strategies for utilizing opioid settlement funds.

WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT

- Work with the state's colleges, universities, and technical high schools to promote career opportunities in municipal government, including finance directors, assessors, planners, building officials, sanitarians, environmental health inspectors (food inspectors), zoning officials, water, and wastewater operators.



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LOCAL BUDGETS & PROPERTY TAXES

- 1) Increase municipal aid to keep pace with inflation and continue to release municipal aid in a timely manner.
- 2) Support investment in local infrastructure by continuing to fund the Town Aid Road, the Local Capital Improvement Program (LoCIP), Clean Water Fund, and continuing to release funding in a timely manner.
- 3) Increase funding for the Local Bridge Program to assist municipalities in improving the safety of bridges and culverts.
- 4) Increase funding for Payment in Lieu of Tax (PILOT) programs to better reimburse municipalities for lost property tax revenues due to state mandated exemptions.
- 5) Ensure that the state provides adequate funding to reimburse municipalities for lost revenues under the car tax cap.
- 6) Continue to use a portion of the state's Rainy Day budget surplus to reduce the state's unfunded pension liabilities and alleviate pressure to cut municipal aid or shift teachers' pension costs to municipalities.
- 7) 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.

- 8) Address concerns regarding the assessment of property taxes on commercial solar arrays.
- 9) Refrain from adopting any new or expanded property tax exemptions or caps which shift a greater burden onto homeowners and businesses.
- 10) Reinstating the PILOT program for manufacturers' personal property to position towns to support manufacturing.
- 11) Delay implementation of revisions to motor vehicle property tax assessments to allow towns to update software and evaluate whether changes shift a greater tax burden to homeowners.

EDUCATION

- 1) Increase Education Cost Sharing (ECS) funding to address inflation costs affecting the delivery of services and ensure that changes to the ECS formula do not negatively impact funding for small towns.
- 2) Increase special education funding under the Excess Cost



- Grant to ensure that recently enacted tiered reimbursement levels do not result in decreases in funding to some school districts.
- 3) Modify the school construction formula to allow municipalities to use federal funds to assist school districts in upgrading systems to improve indoor air quality and increase state funding for such upgrades.
 - 4) Reimburse school districts for transportation costs for special education.
 - 5) Continue to promote efforts to ensure that municipalities and boards of education work together to consolidate non-educational expenditures and functions to improve efficiencies and reduce costs.
 - 6) Assist towns in managing special education costs by a) authorizing Regional Education Service Centers to provide increased special education services to school districts; b) lowering the reimbursement threshold; c) shifting the burden of proof in special education hearings from the school district to the claimant, consistent with federal standards; and d) requiring the state to pay 100% of the costs of special education for severe-needs students.
 - 7) Provide towns with greater flexibility and certainty under the Minimum Budget Requirement to help them reduce education spending.
 - 8) Facilitate the ability of local and regional boards of education to share certain educational services, such as foreign language instruction, curriculum development, Advanced Placement courses, and special education.
 - 9) Allow the use of a five-year rolling average for determining Average Daily Membership in regional schools for purposes of calculating member town allocation.
 - 10) Allow regional school districts to use closed schools for other municipal purposes, including affordable housing.

ENERGY & TECHNOLOGY

- 1) Address broadband challenges in unserved/underserved areas by supporting efforts to ensure that the Public Utilities Regulatory Authority (PURA) adopts One Touch Make Ready regulations to streamline the process for connecting fiber to utility poles.
- 2) Utilize the Connecticut Education Network as the "middle mile" to reduce the costs of extending broadband to unserved/underserved areas.
- 3) Provide resources to municipalities in addressing



- cybersecurity concerns, including authentication.
- 4) Assist municipalities in implementing energy efficiency measures to address increasing electric costs, including energy audits.
 - 5) Support efforts to assist residents with home heating costs, including increasing funding for the Low Income Household Energy Assistance Program.
 - 6) Support efforts to incorporate energy efficiency standards in state building codes.

ENVIRONMENT

- 1) Develop and implement statewide, enforceable policies to enhance municipal solid waste management, including a) food waste diversion programs at schools and other institutions; b) glass only recycling; c) Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR) programs; d) Pay as You Throw programs; and e) organics collection, including streamlining the permitting process for facilities.
- 2) Develop and implement long-term, sustainable solutions for managing municipal solid waste instead of relying on shipping waste out of state.
- 3) Assist communities in funding climate resiliency initiatives to

address flooding, infrastructure, and other concerns.

- 4) Assist towns in complying with the MS4 Stormwater General Permit by targeting grants and training to assist towns in compliance.
- 5) Increase funding available to municipalities to test and remediate soil and wells affected by PFAS and other contaminants.

HOUSING

- 1) Continue to provide grants and technical assistance to support municipalities in preparing and updating municipal affordable housing plans.
- 2) Assist municipalities in increasing water and sewer capacity to support housing and economic development by prioritizing funding for water system interconnections and decentralized wastewater systems and streamlining the process for approving small water systems.
- 3) Provide technical assistance and funding to municipalities to support Transit-Oriented Development, including mixed-use developments.
- 4) Reject efforts to impose state-mandated affordable housing requirements on municipalities or penalize municipalities by



making them ineligible for discretionary grants.

- 5) Amend 8-30g, the Affordable Housing Appeals Process, to provide towns with greater flexibility to address local planning and zoning issues.
- 6) Delay the requirement that various planning and zoning officials obtain land use training until guidance is finalized.

MANDATE RELIEF

- 1) Refrain from adopting any new or expanded unfunded mandates that drive up the cost of local government.
- 2) 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.
- 3) Eliminate the requirement that municipalities store evicted tenants' possessions.
- 4) Increase the prevailing wage threshold for new municipal public works projects from \$1 million to \$3 million and for renovations from \$100,000 to \$500,000.
- 5) Develop a defined contribution plan for new hires under the Municipal Employees Retirement System.

- 6) 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.

PUBLIC HEALTH & SAFETY

- 1) Increase Medicaid reimbursement levels to provide greater support for ambulance services.
- 2) Support initiatives to address staffing shortages of firefighters and emergency medical technicians.
- 3) Address concerns and costs associated with maintaining and providing access to police dashboard/body camera footage.
- 4) Exempt certain law enforcement vehicles from the dashboard camera requirement, including bicycles, motor scooters, animal control vehicles and nonmotorized watercraft.
- 5) Enhance the state's Resident Trooper program to ensure the continued viability of the program, including providing municipalities with greater predictability regarding annual costs.



- 6) Continue to enhance efforts to address the state's opioid crisis, including developing effective local and regional strategies for utilizing opioid settlement funds.
- 7) Assist municipalities in addressing water quality issues stemming from PFAS, sodium chloride, and other contaminants.
- 8) Prohibit the intentional feeding of bears to address concerns regarding the increased bear population in residential areas.
- 9) Coordinate efforts among the state, towns, and utilities to remove dead and decaying trees along roads and other public areas.
- 10) Streamline the process for a police chief to obtain aid from another local law enforcement unit.
- 4) Allow municipalities to amend charters to address impediments to regionalization without subjecting the entire charter to revision.
- 5) Enable regional approaches to state-mandated programs and services, such as stormwater management and special education.
- 6) Facilitate the sharing of noneducational services between municipalities and school districts, such as Human Resources, Information Technology, and building maintenance.

REGIONAL/SHARED SERVICES

- 1) Adequately fund the regional Councils of Government.
- 2) Authorize the use of coalition collective bargaining or otherwise address collective bargaining issues that are an impediment to consolidation/regionalization.
- 3) Establish a statutory framework to facilitate efforts to consolidate Public Safety Answering Points.

WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT

- 1) Implement legislation adopted in 2022 to expand educational programs to assist assessors in obtaining certification in a timely, cost-effective manner.
- 2) Create and fund more frequent offerings for certification programs for assessors, building officials, registered sanitarians, environmental health inspectors (food inspectors), zoning officials, water and wastewater operators, and other technical municipal positions requiring certification in Connecticut.
- 3) Assist municipalities and regional councils of government in sharing certain positions, such



- as building officials and assessors.
- 4) Work with the state's colleges, universities, and technical high schools to promote career opportunities in municipal government, including finance directors, assessors, planners, building officials, sanitarians, environmental health inspectors (food inspectors), zoning officials, water, and wastewater operators.
 - 5) Address concerns regarding the passage rate of individuals sitting for certification exams, including assessors, water, and wastewater operators.
 - 6) Review and improve the reciprocity process for certifications obtained in other states.

If you have any questions or would like to discuss COST's Legislative Platform, please contact COST Executive Director Betsy Gara at bgara@ctcost.org or 860-841-7350.
